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What Melts in the “Melting Pot” of Hong Kong?

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Abstract

This paper analyses the vicissitudes of Hong Kong people’s waves of hostility toward visitors from mainland China, treating the hostility as exemplary of a more general but extensive problem of racialism in China. It has two intentions. First, it wants to understand historically how since the start of the twenty-first century, the simplicity of Hong Kongers’ confused response towards mainlanders has grown into a series of organised “anti-mainlander campaigns” and an allegedly “racist” phenomenon. Second, this paper seeks to document and investigate these sometimes-dangerous sentiments that characterise, confuse and overtake the Hong Kongers’ struggle for liberal democracy and regional autonomy. To do so is *not* to pattern itself on the Chinese state’s announced goal of policing Hong Kong’s status as a “special administrative region.” Although Hong Kongers derive small political benefit from such “campaigns,” they have few ways in which they can overcome the prospect of losing their distinctiveness and becoming one of the many cities of “global China.” Given the complex origins of this Hong Kong-mainland relationship in historical colonialism and global capitalism, and given the People’s Republic’s new power and status as a key player in the global capital order, Hong Kongers seek to express themselves through free speech, but doing so in a way which creates a public spectacle.

Keywords

Racism, Hong Kong, anti-mainland campaigns, Tibet, colonialism, civility

[M]en are... creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness[.]... their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy

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For his moral support and for making available to me his first-hand knowledge of residing in Hong Kong as a mainlander for the last six years, I am grateful to Wang Dongqing and shall acknowledge him to be the second author of this essay. For helpful suggestions of the essay, I thank Susan Philip, Mohammad A. Quayum and Eddie Tay. Eddie Tay has been a humane and patient editor. For financial support, I wish to acknowledge the Early Career Scheme offered by University Grants Committee of Hong Kong.

their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him *Homo homini lupus*. (Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 66)

Among the insights of Freud that truly extend even into culture and sociology, one of the most profound seems to me to be that civilization itself produces anti-civilization and increasingly reinforces it. . . . If barbarism itself is inscribed within the principle of civilization, then there is something desperate in the attempt to rise up against it. (Theodor Adorno, “Education after Auschwitz” 191-92)

In January 2012, Kong Qingdong 孔慶東, a Peking University professor who aspired to being “a public intellectual,” made some offensive comments on Hong Kong (HK), and on some HK people as “running dogs for the British colonialists” (Jakarta Globe). As “dogs,” these Hong Kongers are “not human” (Jakarta Globe). It would not be advisable to take Kong’s remarks seriously, for not only does this man indulge in the media spotlight but also he has a misguided notion of what makes a public intellectual.² Moreover, his remarks relating what the Chinese state calls “the problem of HK” to the question of national sovereignty echo the former’s discourse about the colonial legacy of HK. To say the least, Kong intended to provoke and impress the mainlanders with a public rhetorical stunt, performing as a result a critically stunted response to the perceived unjustified hostility towards mainland visitors in HK. Beyond its linguistic shock, Kong’s commentary is an expression of an “incivility” indicative of profound political and socio-cultural resentment towards HK. The immediate cause of Kong’s remark is the publication of a full-page ad by *Apple Daily* 蘋果日報, arguably the most popular local newspaper, which likens mainlanders to a gigantic locust on a hilltop overlooking the HK skyline. The ad was, as *Wall Street Journal* found out, “paid for by an online fund-raising campaign on Facebook and local site HK Golden, which received more than 100,000 HK dollars (US\$12,900) from 800 donors in a week” (*Wall Street Journal*).

This difficult relationship between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and its Special Administrative Region (SAR) HK is part of a much larger historical process. As it determines the livelihood of those living on the borders now, it also contains specific textures, especially of the cultural, political and

² This is not the first time Kong made outrageous remarks on public issues. He has a record of making up tantalizing stories. Recently, for example, he fabricated a “completely untrue” story about Michelle Obama’s visit to China and calling names of those who questioned him in one of his posts: “All of you are dogs of America and traitors to China.” See Jacobs and Yuan.

ideological sort, that for decades have made up the very condition of the current impasse. This paper analyses the vicissitudes of HK people's waves of hostility toward mainlanders, treating the hostility as exemplary of a more general but extensive problem of racialism in China. It has two intentions. First, it wants to understand historically how the simplicity of Hong Kongers' early confused response towards their "mainland cousins" – as "illegal immigrants" in the 1980s and then as "tourist-cum-consumers" since the 21st century – has now grown into large-scale verbal violence and a crude, allegedly "racist" phenomenon. Second, it is part of this paper's procedure to document and investigate these sometimes-dangerous sentiments that characterise, confuse and overtake the Hong Kongers' struggle for liberal democracy and regional autonomy, and to historicise the impact of these sentiments on the peoples of the two territories. To do so is *not*, of course, to pattern itself on the Chinese state's announced goal of policing and vetting HK's status as a "special administrative region." Although Hong Kongers derive small political benefit from such verbal violence against mainlanders, they have few ways in which they can overcome the prospect of losing their distinctiveness and merely becoming one of the many cities of "global China." Given the complex historical origins of this difficult HK-mainland relationship in colonialism and global capitalism, and given the authoritarian PRC's new power and status as a key player in the global capital order, Hong Kongers seek to express themselves through free speech, but doing so in a way which creates a public spectacle. What should concern us, however, are the implications contained within these spectacles, which have not only been unmannered and uncivilised, but more worryingly also border on being pathetically "racist."

The Controversy of "We are All Chinese"

Nearly two decades after the Handover of 1997, the PRC and its SAR HK have not come closer though the latter has become increasingly dependent on the booming mainland economy. Early this year, the 34-year-old local star Ella Koon wrote a commentary titled, "Kick Out Hatred and Discrimination," published in the *de circonstance* section of *Ming Pao* 明報, the leading Chinese-language local daily. "In the face of inescapable cultural differences, we should have a tolerant heart," Koon explained, because "we are all Chinese" (Koon). Admittedly, Koon's underlying racial generalisation of this call for harmony has its own problems; it attempts to offer neither a representative account of Chinese identity nor an in-depth analysis of HK's attitude towards the mainland. It is but an appeal to the city's cosmopolitan breadth of mind to host tourists and visitors from Mainland China. She made a significant connection between the present state of HK and its colonial past in terms of experiences of racialism and ethnic resentment. In the colonial era, the British treated Hong Kongers in ways similar to how Hong Kongers have treated mainlanders since

the 1980s; the colonial masters laughed at Hong Kongers for being noisy and disorderly, for being “rude” and “uncivilized,” for behaviour similar to that of today’s mainland travellers in HK and abroad. Referring to her own experience in England, Koon spoke vaguely about how Westerners treated her with contempt because of her cultural background and language skills, emphasising the importance of developing sympathy and consensus in harmonious co-existence. She was appealing to the city’s natural sympathy and humanity that she thought of as important for the development of HK society as a whole. In her words,

We grow up in different cultures and under different conditions, [we] should not discriminate [mainlanders] from the outset, but rather, should accommodate and assist our compatriots to understand our culture and society.... We should achieve mutual understanding through being together, and build a society in which people from different places and speak differently co-exist. (Koon)

Contrary to her good wishes, the response to Koon’s appeal to HK’s cosmopolitanism and Hong Kongers’ own experience of discrimination in the colonial era was one-sidedly critical, even unexpectedly antagonistic. In the heat of today’s anti-PRC, anti-mainlander sentiments, any wavering in the stance about issues related to the mainland produces in HK’s established discourse of the PRC and mainlanders a crisis of meaning. We should see this crisis as part of HK’s long-standing, apparently “spontaneous” practice of discrimination and relate it critically to a series of inquiries into this society’s self-proclaimed enterprise of “civility.” We will see that this enterprise rests on a limited understanding of the historical condition and social function of “cosmopolitan civility,” on, that is, the society’s unreflective acquisition of what Walter Jackson Bate called “the premises of taste” (Bate).

In the context of post-colonial HK, the limits of understanding and lack of reflection about “cosmopolitan civility” have, in part, complex linkages to colonial modernity. Language, for example, as an instrument for the forging and expression of local identity, is a post-Enlightenment notion that should serve to resist the imperial view of language as universal. Even so, HK people’s linguistic attachment to not only English as the *de facto* international language but also British English as the mother tongue of their former master is extraordinary. This attachment to British English is just as much about HK’s political identity as its linguistic identity. British English has for decades been one of the most effective instruments by which locals distinguish and reinvent themselves socially, economically and politically, even though HK-Cantonese is linguistically a branch and variety of Cantonese, the local dialect of the Guangdong province of China. Whereas HK’s recent protest against the threat

of Putonghua and the subduing of the Cantonese dialect should be fully supported, how was it that in 1998, parents, teachers and school masters in HK engaged in “a storm of protest” against the SAR government’s mandate to use Chinese (Cantonese) as a medium of instruction in schools (Boyle 77, see also 65-84)? Granted, linguistic imperialism is a cultural and political vice, a masked conquest, and a form of state ambition. Given the same geo-political space, demography and generations of people, how does the practice work for one race against another? More specifically put, how could the linguistic imperialism of British English maintain its position, while its Putonghua counterpart be seen as a deplorable presence?

Koon found herself under a public siege. Within days of the publication of her commentary, her Facebook page was awash with hundreds of abusive and “uncivilised” attacks. Again and again in the comments, netizens bashed Koon as a wicked “traitor” of the city, a “HK bandit” prostituting HK for her own interests and benefit.³ Thus, for example, these hyperbolic responses to Koon’s claim that “we are all Chinese”: “the Truth is, Chinese from The Red Soviet-China r intentionally invading us,” (sic) an attack which includes “raping the civilization we built” (Lu). Or, “Go to China to be ‘bought and melted’ [包溶] by the mainlanders since you love China so much” (*Observer*). In mandarin Chinese, “包溶” and “包容” have the same *pinyin*; while both are pronounced *baorong*, the latter means open-mindedness and tolerance, the former – literally meaning “bought and melted” – makes a vulgar remark on the singer’s sexuality and profession, no doubt intended to insinuate that Koon would have no qualms about conducting illicit affairs in the mainland. In the end, netizens reduced Koon’s imperative injection of sense into HK-mainland relations to a perceived invasion of HK; the supposed “invader” backed down in tears only days after the post. Under “the pressure of public opinion” (*Observer*), Koon explained in a public appearance, apologetically, that she wrote the article for reasons unrelated to the current HK-mainland conflict.

Increasingly in recent years, one witnesses similar expressions and sentiments of resentment that puncture the thin layer of HK’s cosmopolitan civility. These voices range from politically organised groups to spontaneous social and individual groups. The well-funded societies of “pan-democrat” liberalism and their far-right variant, loosely grouped around the Party of “People Power” 人民力量 and its followers, called “Civic Passion” 熱血公民, occasionally, though not infrequently or inconsequentially, have led the public

³ Koon’s Facebook page, which has close to a hundred thousand fans, was scrubbed of all content on the incident posted after January 13, but the vitriol lives on in other such mirror sites as the Chinese-language website *Observer*. See excerpts of such comments from the mainland website *Observer* 觀察者.

into the heat of some sizable anti-mainland campaigns. More spontaneous anti-mainland groups surge towards social media like Facebook, where “interest pages” of a similar kind, such as “PassionTimes” 熱血時報 (211,094 likes), “HK Golden” 香港高登 (96,446 likes), “HK Golden Undercovers” 高登起底組 (76,525 likes), “Talk HK” 港人自講 (3,627 likes), and “Criminal Records of Mainlanders in HK” 中國人在香港犯罪記錄 (3,953 likes), abound. The print newspaper *Apple Daily* is among the more locally invested platforms that would contain, record, circulate and reproduce the discourse of anti-mainland sentiments. The online blog *Real Hong Kong News*, which seeks to “tell the world” “the REAL NEWS that the English-language media are not telling you,” is one more example of anti-mainland fora. Indeed, the blog has a ready category for anyone who, like Koon, attempts to engage in talk about cultural tolerance in view of HK’s anti-mainland sentiments: “a gang of bandits [who] forces the people of HK to be saints” (*gangzhei* 港賊) (*Real Hong Kong News*). Last but not least, the website *Hong Kong Golden* 香港高登, active since 2011, has a complementary discussion forum that is open in structure and topics, creating a virtual “community of critics” in which citizens discuss “all manner of local topics” (*Wikipedia*). Given its openness to ordinary citizens, it is also a hot bed of local slang and neologisms, which “would quickly pass virally into colloquial usage” (*Wikipedia*). While it “circulates local news faster than any other media” in HK, it is, not coincidentally, also the sponsor of the controversial “Locust” ad mentioned at the beginning.⁴ In this essay, whenever appropriate, I will use references from *South China Morning Post*, the English-language local paper, which is relatively neutral or less locally marked, in reporting HK-mainland affairs.

How could one community hate another when they have such close historical connections, linguistic identity and geographical proximity? After all, the case of mainlanders in HK is not the same as that of Russians in Ukraine, or American citizens in Iraq. Xenophobia, though often evoked in critical comments on Hong Kongers’ reaction to mainlanders, falls short of explaining the issue. The difference between the two territories is manifestly not one of

⁴ According to Agnes S.W. Tang, a university graduate in her mid-twenties and a political activist committed to such pro-democratic movements in HK as the “Protest Against National Education” in 2012 and “Occupy Central” in 2014, “*Hong Kong Golden* is not really something one should actively participate in. It not only gathers most young people’s ideas but also holds the most destructive power as it circulates false information and seeks to solve social problems in the most improper and unfeasible ways. I’d say it is valuable only in the way it somehow brings many young minds to care about society, and that it circulates local news faster than any other media (including Facebook and Twitter)” (Tang).

ethnic division, given especially HK's historical connection with the mainland, especially its southern region; nonetheless, the division is as unbridgeable as ethnic difference, perplexed and perforated on a daily basis by mutual mistrust, rejection and humiliation. When Koon attempted to defuse the habit of criticism to a public marked by regional hatred and indignations, she was perceived as betraying this public. She opened the Pandora's Box containing discourses and institutions that produced new realities that demand careful analysis. The forces that produced these conjoined new realities are "cosmopolitan civility," racialism of a sort, HK's colonial history and identity and Chinese statism.

Spectacles of Free Speech

The bursts of anger at Koon are only the tip of the iceberg of the entrenched popular hostility towards visiting mainlanders. Recent public campaigns targeting mainland tourists are live performances of such popular hostility, and vivid examples of the *realpolitik* at its most vulgar and least ethical. Among the numerous examples of these "anti-mainlander campaigns," some went viral and even international. They include, naming only a few, the "anti-locust" campaign,⁵ the anti-mainland-consumer parody protest,⁶ and the "anti-anti-civilization behavior operation" that sought to mock a defecating mainland toddler (see Zhao). To make matters worse, Hong Kongers' antagonistic advances against mainlanders are sometimes done along racial lines, a fact that is crystallised by the comparison of mainland visitors with *huangchong* (蝗蟲 locusts), sometimes even "*zhina huangchong*" (支那蝗蟲 Chinese locusts) – a choice of words that is as sinister as it is offensive. The word *huangchong* alludes to the phrase *huanghuo* (黃禍 the Yellow Perils) in its pronunciation and semantic suggestiveness. The campaigners' call to "eliminate" *huangchong* is reminiscent of the cry against the Chinese immigrants in Europe and the US in the early twentieth century, an expression of the racist impulse in our society under a veneer of developed civility and metropolitan sophistication. The adjectival noun *zhina*, equivalent of the term "chinaman," acquired philological significance in early twentieth-century Japanese documents, straddling the problem of Hong Kongers' derogation of mainlanders as it evokes the way Japanese referred to Chinese as "slaves of Qing Dynasty" during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Could we not say that the protesters' strategy in their

⁵ See protest signs reading "Locusts, die go home" aimed at mainlanders in *South China Morning Post* (Ng).

⁶ On March 8, 2014, dozens of protesters dressed as Red Guards took the street as they parodied mainlanders, churning the slogan "love their country and party" and "shop at home" (Tam and Chiu).

farcical campaigns is a variant of racism? Does this question seem inappropriate because it subsumes the ethnic and cultural relationship of difference between Hong Kongers and mainlanders under a racial one? Alternatively, is it inappropriate because in post-colonial HK and post-Mao, post-Deng China, mainlanders in the South are on the front line of the “economic reform” and ideological mutation and as such must pay for the financial benefits they receive with the price of self-effacement, of ethnic flattening? When the SAR government attempted to mitigate its citizens’ negative feelings towards the PRC, it was at a loss for proper measures to do so. For one thing, it has been struggling to define their citizens’ campaigns as a standard exercise of some few hundred individuals’ freedom of speech, or as a matter of individuals infringing the city’s Public Order laws, or, more seriously, as a case against the Race Discrimination Ordinance (Ngo).

These spectacles of anti-mainlander campaigns are melodramatic, but they contain sentiments that are representative of HK’s escalating radicalism against mainlanders. Admittedly, more educated and diplomatic elements of HK question and condemn this hot air.⁷ In an interview with *Ming Pao*, for example, editors of *Undergrad*, the campus magazine of the University of Hong Kong (HKU), made clear that they do not identify with the “locust talk.” For them, the act of likening mainlanders to “locusts” reflects badly on HK; it is symptomatic of the society’s anti-government sentiments as they express themselves in a form of racialism (Cin and Zeng).⁸ In the business sector, supporters of Beijing’s “free tour” programme argue in terms of economic benefits.⁹ The business tycoon Li Ka-Shing, often referred to as “superman” because of his wealth and building empire, spoke at a press conference about how mainland tourists boosted HK’s economy (Sitto). Beijing’s response to HK’s resentment was less politicised than expected, attributing its hostility against mainland tourists to the city’s lack of capacity in terms of space and infrastructure to accommodate large number of tourists and to HK’s anxiety over the loss of economic edge over such mainland cities as Shanghai and Shenzhen. *Global Times* published a long commentary on the demonstration on February 28 this year, claiming that just in the year 2013, 40 million mainland tourists generated a revenue of 440 billion in retail alone in HK. HK had 54

⁷ See such media responses as these in Lo and SCMP Editorial.

⁸ It is important to note, however, that the interview was conducted and appeared in the heat of the student-led “Umbrella Democracy Movement.” Given the environment of the time, the student leaders must be politically sensitive and careful enough to know the importance of clearing their movement off from any vulgar forms of street fighting and railing.

⁹ Intended as a medium- to long-term measure to boost HK’s consumption and tourism figures that dropped drastically because of the SARS epidemic outbreak in 2003, Beijing launched two operations: the “Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement” (CEPA) between mainland and HK and “free tours” in which mainlanders could travel to HK more easily for shopping and sightseeing. See Earnshaw, esp. 436-39.

million visitors in 2013, 70% of whom were from the mainland. It is estimated that by 2017 there would be 70 million tourists, and in 2023 one hundred million. The mainland's economic development has made a striking difference to Chinese tourists-cum-consumers; HK, *Global Times* claims, is jealous of the mainland's prosperity and its tourists' growing spending capacities (*Global Times*). This holds some truth, but it would be off the mark were we to understand the current hostility as the result of intractable personal sentiment, which, though widespread and even discursive, has little historical weight but has deep socio-moral ramifications.

This reading along economic lines trivialises the current difficulties. Hong Kongers' rejection of mainlanders as a racialised class of people irrespective of regions and roles, whom they lump together under the Cantonese umbrella term, "Ar-Chan" 阿燦, has historical roots that come from long before the recent spectacle of China's consumer power. In effect, the Ar-Chans of the late 20th-century are the locusts of the current decade. Originating from the character in a primetime TV series *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly* 網中人, the term Ar-Chan flew into popular circulation instantly, not coincidentally at the same time as the British-HK Government decided to replace the so-called "Touch Base Policy" with a tighter measure against the influx of mainland immigrants. The "Touch Base Policy" meant that any mainlanders who managed to reach the urban areas and met with their relatives could apply for the right of abode in HK. Essentially, such a legal policy presumed all mainlanders were illegal immigrants and identified and policed those who immigrated to HK.¹⁰ In the eyes of Hong Kongers, mainlanders now are but walking examples of Ar-Chans, who are, as the TV drama together with the immigration policies made vivid, symbols of illegality, potential threats, and sources of social unrest. They can appear always and only as lazy, dependent and expensive refugees, out of tune with the pace of HK society, and so an impediment to HK's efforts to become a "world-class" city, and a challenge to the city's identity as a cosmopolis.

The problematics of "Ar-Chan" aside, one must ask: would it be morally justifiable to humiliate mainlanders if their visits and consumption were less economically consequential for HK? What would become of cross-border interactions, understanding and exchange were we to build relationships on such discourses as this one, typically: "Mainland tourists are... bees, pollinating HK's economy so that it can bloom. By trying to drive off mainland tourists, the protestors are rocking the local economy's boat, which could cost many people their jobs" (Liang). Besides its self-congratulatory and perhaps

¹⁰ In 1974, the colonial government adopted the "Touch Base Policy" as a measure against the influx of immigrants from the Chinese mainland. For the discussion of the workings of the Policy in HK immigration history, see Eng 203-30.

narcissistic assessment of the PRC’s national economic strength, this reading only reassures the power of the State and capital – one that reproduces and extends itself while at the same time engendering fissures, conflicts and ever more radicalism between and among social groups. The segmentation of life and space along the lines of our currently recognised “consumption power,” as business tycoons, government operations and civic education establish in our social consciousness, is mythologised in the Barthesian sense of the term. The current trend in the compartmentalisation of social, cultural and geographical space reflects really a will to control and dominate the movement of resources and people on the part of overarching State policies and government authoritarian deliberations that disregard the nuances of human interaction across social-cultural, economic and political borders.

In effect, it is precisely material civilisation itself, in its current state-organised and globalised form, which causes fissures among the people. Once increased cross-border traffic sharpens distinctions between Hong Kongers and mainlanders in terms of life styles, and as State machinery continues to assert uniform “development” across regions and interest groups, the PRC’s claim to the idea of a united China shatters and potentially disastrous conflicts emerge. There is value in understanding and archiving HK’s anti-mainland sentiments especially in view of HK’s increasingly uphill struggle for regional autonomy within the framework of a working relationship with “China” as a country. While we must acknowledge that HK’s British legacy influences the city’s anti-mainland campaigns, we should guard, however, against those powerful interests, which vulgarly and opportunistically attempt to dismiss HK’s struggle against State domination as merely an after-effect of historical colonialism. In other words, we need to insert into our reading of HK’s current spectacles of free speech a dialectical understanding of colonial modernity and not accept the PRC’s charge that British historical colonialism alone motivates HK’s anti-mainland campaigns. We need also to see in the current anti-mainland sentiments evidence of HK people’s difficulty in not only accepting the assigned position of a regional host but also protecting with anxious mistrust the disappearing frontier.

The Ordeal of Civility

HK has always been a shining example of the success of free-market capitalism. In the case of British rule over HK, the capitalists appear to have solidified their domination over their subjects and to have secured the subjects’ subservience by translating and organising their respective interests – namely, colonial capital and “international entrepot” – into an organic whole. The example of HK’s overwhelming resistance to the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction at schools, discussed before, illustrates well the effect of the process in which colonial capital, when taking possession of HK’s means of material

production, gained possession of the means of intellectual and cultural production. The informal online poll, entitled, “Would Hong Kongers vote to return to a British overseas territory, given the option?,” conducted by *South China Morning Post* in March 2014 shows that 92 per cent who voted think Hong Kongers would prefer a return to British rule.¹¹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain how the former British Empire’s language and system of domination count so much in post-1997 HK. For what, according to *The German Ideology*, is a “ruling idea” but “the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance” (Marx and Engels)?

The permanence of the ideological and political division between HK and the mainland is, in part, a result of HK’s unique colonial history and memory. W.H. Auden’s poem “Hong Kong” (1939), written in colonial HK on the eve of World War II, describes HK as an international financial centre in which some “[s]ubstantial men of birth and education” who are “leading characters with wide experience of administration” turn HK into the natural home of some “bankers” who indulge in the “manners of a modern city” (Auden). Hence, HK has served for the British Empire as the safe port because it is “[t]en thousand miles from home,” from the global war that, to the city, “thuds like the slamming of a distant door.” The poem scorns the joy which colonial capital and modernity feel when they affirm themselves as the “leading characters” in a place where they “cannot postulate a General Will” (Auden). The experience and understanding of HK as a place of ahistorical non-place, a financial centre kept at a (safe) distance from the vortex of world politics, a cosmopolitan modernity in which capital asserts its will over a class of herd-like “servants,” might have brought readers to anticipate a better HK upon the end of colonial rule. Yet, history involves forces that cannot be put neatly on the radar of hope, and the new reality was not the return of an old modernity.

The HK-mainland ideological and political divarication makes evident and determines that the cold war between liberal capitalism and Chinese-style socialism, or socialism with Chinese characteristics, would have been continuous and will continue into the future. In the wake of 1997, especially in the first decade after its return to China, HK’s contribution to China’s economic reform is significant. As a living example of the workings of global capital and a triumphant story of “free market” economy, HK served as a great model of capitalism at the doorstep of Mainland China, which was then struggling to relocate its resources from political struggles and ideological movements to economic and technological development. The value of HK in the early phase of the PRC’s “30 years of reform” is as real as it is recognised and acknowledged, but no doubt also appropriated. At the early stage of the so-

¹¹ 3,966 readers had voted “yes,” while 373 voted “no” in the poll (Radio Free Asia).

called “Open-door” policy, HK was crucial in assisting it in the choice of a radically different path of development and served as one of the most important factors that contributed to the surge of China’s developing economy. Some even argue that Soviet Union’s reform was less successful because it did not have an equivalent of HK – the “springboard” to the global economy – participating in its post-Cold War transformation.¹²

The PRC’s development of “capitalism,” though subsuming the ideological and political differences to the demands of its market reforms, has created fresh issues for HK and posed unprecedented challenges to the relationship between the two places. The distrust between the *peoples* of the two places has always been about differences that concern the culture and politics of a place – the way we live, speak and govern ourselves. Regional variation and developmental unevenness in economy and life style are a real and indissmissible source of continuing tension, conflict and hostility. One of the major objections to mainland tourists is that they were ill mannered or uncivilised: coarse and rough when they were less wealthy, but gaudy and vulgar when they could dispose offhand of a colossal amount on luxury products. Civilisation is understood in its sense of external manners and properties that registers not so much the Arnoldian dream of “cultural advancement” but one’s social location – class and representation.

Consider “civility” – historically a product of the European bourgeois imagination, one remembers well how “civility” is in effect a protective measure in facilitating human relationships. Thinkers and writers from Goethe to Karl Marx, from Jane Austen to Charles Dickens, noted how each stage of capital’s development, while as such including older phases of economic activity, entirely changed the nature of human relationships. As capital develops new stages of materiality and technologies, it alters and produces human desires that gear toward material and technological civilisations more than and against other kinds of civilisation. The word “civilisation” became, for the German-Jewish critic Walter Benjamin, an oxymoron: society is barbaric precisely because it is civilised. Benjamin’s worry about the advance of mechanical and material civilisation, especially if such advancement fell out of step with the given society’s cultural development, has to come from S.T. Coleridge’s famous distinction between civilisation and culture:

[C]ivilization is itself but a mixed good, if not far more a corrupting influence, the hectic of disease, not the bloom of health, and a nation so

¹² See Michael B. Share for an account of how despite the Sino-Soviet Alliance (1945-60), Chinese communist forces rejected Soviet “assistance” and refused to retake HK. The PRC’s seeming tolerance of HK’s status as a British colony has made clear how China understood the significance of HK as a “port city” and a “free market,” as precisely not part of China, during the Cold War era and beyond (Share 107-64).

disguised more fitly to be called a varnished than a polished people, where this civilization is not grounded in cultivation, in the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterize our humanity. (46)

For Coleridge, the hypothesis of civilisation precludes contents and implies vulgarity. If “idle” civility, as George Orwell observed, is the unspoken desire of the bourgeois gentleman,¹³ Coleridge’s “varnish” defines the very character of this bourgeois “idleness.” The outward varnish of civilisation acquires another level of truth in the work of the cultural anthropologist Edward B. Tylor. In *Primitive Culture*, Tylor singles out the case of colonialism to argue that the “advance of culture *seldom* results at once in unmixed good” (29; my emphasis): The white invader or colonist, though representing on the whole a higher moral standard than the savage he improves or destroys, often represents his standard very ill, and at best can hardly claim to substitute a life stronger, nobler and purer at every point than that which he supersedes (31).

The fact that Tylor’s observation should apply to both the relationship between the British “colonist” and the then Hong-Kong “savage” on the one hand, and that of cosmopolitan capitalists in contemporary HK and their counterparts on the mainland on the other, is ironic beyond measure. It is not my purpose here, however, to examine how “stronger,” “nobler,” or “purer” the life of the savage might be, or to trace the exact genealogical contour of capitalistic vulgarity – a sign of civilisational development that has begun to set store by external materials, in the case of HK, wealth and a narrow sense of social civility.¹⁴ My point is that in post-colonial HK, discursive vulgarity is not always an organised and politically conscious articulation, but more like a socio-cultural behaviour that is indicative of HK society’s failure to rise above a part of the “civilisation” that it inherited from the burdened “white men.” The discursive vulgarity exists as a form of regional discrimination, exercised and displayed within national boundaries, not along lines of biological differentiation, but because of civilisational and geo-economic divergences. For sure, such regional discrimination is not unique to HK; it manifests itself in multiple forms and is an active force in different parts of China, especially those coastal areas that make connections with the external world.¹⁵ What is characteristically HK in the practice of “racism” is that it contains a developed sense of a cosmopolitan civility derived from colonial modernity. HK’s civility

¹³ In a 1940 essay entitled “Charles Dickens,” Orwell gave his readers a memorable account of “the strange, empty dream of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century middle bourgeoisie.” It is, Orwell proclaimed, “a dream of *complete idleness*” (Orwell 44; emphasis original).

¹⁴ See Tony Tanner’s critical reading of Jane Austen’s depiction of property and class and their decisive influence on personal formation (Tanner 142-75).

¹⁵ In Shanghai, China, for example, popular prejudice against those from the north (the vast region north of the Yangtze River), has long been seen as expression of the city’s local snobbery.

is part of historical colonialism, which, though transformed and altered in its place of origin, has survived and fossilised in the metropolitan colony and has been an active force in the people’s socio-political unconscious.

HK’s regional discrimination, founded on global capital and venerated by its corresponding modernity and civility, and taken as a position on and against mainlanders, became formalised and institutionalised as an issue of “race” this summer. On July 9, 2014, Chow Yat-ngok, Chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission, considered amending the existing anti-discrimination laws to cover discrimination against members of the same ethnic group. He hence instructed the Commission to launch a three-month public consultation, highlighting the race law, “saying the proposed amendment will provide better protection to immigrants and tourists” (Wong). Leaving aside, for this paper, questions that we might ask about the SAR government’s underlying motives in amending the anti-discrimination laws, the fact is that HK’s anti-mainlander mockeries and mimicries have become real in that they have now produced governmental power.

The essay’s final section will remark on the political and social implications of this specific kind of “racialist” sentiment in HK. Such sentiment, as a version of the idea of a civilised society, has a consequential role to play in the metropolis’ still developing relations with both the authoritarian State and the “mainland cousins,” and subsequently, in its struggle for a practice of life, of law, and of democracy that characterises and ensures regional autonomy. Before that, however, I would like to insert into the discussion, for sake of contrast, another case of racialism: the case of (Han) Chinese’s aggression against such ethnic peoples as Tibetans and Uyghurs currently settling at the PRC border. In the mainland, the relation of (ethnic) “minorities” to the Han majority manifests itself as a seeming counterpoint to that in HK. In the “autonomous regions” Northwest of China, the “minorities” break down;¹⁶ Han Chinese exercise hegemonic power in the absence of any real threat to livelihood, identity and socio-economic practices. *Both* Hong Kongers and mainlanders, in their respective discrimination against their own “uncivilised” targets, show us persons who rise in stature because of heightened self-consciousness. In HK, the criterion for this consciousness consists of cosmopolitan civility, of the global capitalist type of transported civility. In the mainland, the touchstone of “civilisation” is what Jiang Rong, in *Wolf Totem*, calls “Han civilization” or “agrarian civilization,” which Jiang conceives as a direct opposite of the nomads’ “grassland civilization” (Jiang 304). In both

¹⁶ As a multi-ethnic state, China is comprised of fifty-six officially recognised ethnic groups. The Han ethnic group (Hanzu) is the majority group, comprising over 91 per cent of the population. The fifty-five ethnic “minority” groups live mostly in the PRC’s vast borderlands, an arc stretching from northeast to southwest, traversing ecosystems that range from birch and evergreen forest to steppe, to broken uplands, and to jungle.

cases, Hong Kongers and mainlanders are allies in their defense of “civility” and, inseparable from it, discriminative practices as they participate in activities leading to the emergence, advocacy, and fortification of a people’s ethnic identity. The charge of popular racialism is as true for mainlanders as for Hong Kongers.

The Case of Tibet

While each side of the Tibet issue appeals to complex historical archives in discussing the legitimacy of Tibetan independence,¹⁷ the fact of the matter is that Tibet’s experience of oppression and colonisation is real and we need not settle the “mandarin” textual questions to see the painful consequences of PRC expropriation of Tibet as it expands its empire. Tibet’s present situation is concrete and felt immediately in everyday experience; it supports and drives the more historically complex desire for independence.¹⁸ Reform and development led to an extraordinary concentration of power and amalgamation of State authority and market capital. Population transfer and movement leading to the destruction of Tibetan culture is as much the deeds of State policy as it is also the attractive work of capital. In his address to “The U.S. Congressional Human Right’s Caucus” held on September 21, 1987 in Washington, DC, the Dalai Lama urged China to abandon what he called “China’s population transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people” (1987). He made clear that about 7.5 million Chinese settlers in Tibet “outnumber” the Tibetan population of 6 million. Fast economic development and expansion have created new classes of people – the poor, the weak and the under-privileged. Unlike historical imperial projects in the former colonies, which were openly exploitative along racial lines, China’s neoliberal economic structure, with its massive concentration of capital in State enterprises and State-monitored projects of infrastructure, has achieved control over historically under-developed countries by retarding and monopolising the economy of these places. Tibet is the heartland of the problems of Chinese economic modernisation.

¹⁷ The advent of “the question of Tibet” in the second half of the 19th century followed the deepening crisis of the Qing government in its own legitimacy of rule. After repeated defeats by the English navy, and beset by domestic unrest and the Taiping Rebellion, the Qing government was too occupied to maintain its symbolic rule and governance over Tibet. By the mid-19th century, China’s colonial and imperial claim over Tibet declined and decayed: “After the Opium Wars, in order to cope with its coastal challenges, the Qing government, on its own initiative, abandoned the right of its commissioner in Tibet to inspect the commercial income and expenditures of both the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, as well as certain military rights” (Wang 165).

¹⁸ Tibetans’ desire for self-determination and political autonomy is popular and real despite the Dalai Lama’s repeated statement that he does not want to have a separate Tibet: “Ours is not a separatist movement. It is in our own interest to remain in a big nation like China. We are not splittists” (Dalai Lama 2005). See the same statement also from Tibetan Parliament and Policy Research Center.

Threatening Tibet with its recent “rise” and “transformation” into a mutant global capital, the PRC has chained its neighbouring countries to its empire. As the Chinese State compels Tibetans to serve as a fragment of the wheel of its “economic reforms,” it also acts as the sole proprietor of its people, moving Han Chinese into Tibet and thus providing its people with a mature condition of State-sponsored economic exploitation and territorial expansion. The Tibetan author Woeser and her Han husband Wang Lixiong have detailed effects of neo-liberal marketization on Tibet. In Woeser and Wang’s account, a Tibetan tailor needs more than half a month to make a Tibetan robe, five times longer than what it takes a Han tailor, who converts what must be a communal activity into a matter of profit-oriented business, and who thus spends two to three days only on the task. In the city of Lhasa, Han Chinese operate taxis and rickshaws; occupy most of the jobs in such profit-making industries as automobile repair, shoe-making and farming; take up half of the Tibetan furniture market in terms of production and sales. Moreover, Han Chinese have recently begun to expand to such areas of business that have been traditionally specialised by Tibetans as Tibetan restaurants and Buddha-statue manufacture. According to Woeser and Wang, in Lhasa, the Han take over most jobs, keeping away from a couple of very specialised areas of work such as celestial burial. What do Tibetans live on? Rental income. Forced out of work and defeated in the market competition, Tibetans rent their houses to Han Chinese who have “come” to do business in Lhasa (Woeser and Wang 139-40). This is a familiar story of modernity and empire expansion: economic imperialism is concurrent with the disappearance of tradition and local life.

Wang Lixiong, an independent writer who has lived in Tibet for several decades, demonstrates with compelling evidence that the Han idea of Tibet is strikingly “orientalist,” and probably more so than those found in historical orientalist accounts.¹⁹ In his account, Tibetans are living the lives of second-class citizens; even a Han manual worker in Lhasa would think of himself as superior to Tibetans.²⁰ Wang reports that long-distance coaches running between Qinghai and Tibet are a walking exhibition of Han racism. Han passengers are blatant and upfront about their *collective* hostility to their fellow Tibetan passengers, describing the Tibetans as “dirty and smelly,” policing, and confining them, as a matter of the driver’s instructions, to the rear part of the coach. Once, when Wang insisted that a Tibetan passenger should sit in the same row as he did rather than sitting in a rear seat, surrounding Han passengers quickly moved away, leaving Wang and the Tibetan segregated from

¹⁹ For examples of Han Chinese stereotyping of Tibet, see Wang 1998.

²⁰ Chinese racism is deep-rooted and makes up a historically complex account. Manchurian government had the same attitude towards its former neighbours. In Qing dynasty, such peoples as Tibetans, Muslims and the Manchu were geographically and institutionally segregated. The Qing government allowed each to have its own political and legal systems (see Heuschert; also Cassel).

other Han passengers. It is impossible to imagine in Tibet an equivalent to the Rosa Parks protest and trial in the US in 1955 and equally impossible to imagine the equivalent of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in China.

Racial segregation can be popular and spontaneous, not necessarily always the announced intention of an overtly political project of colonisation, but that of market forces and globalised models of production and consumption, even though this marketization is, no doubt, a conscious policy ambition on the part of the Chinese State.²¹ In other words, racial discrimination could appear to be as mythical as it is mystifying. Marketization and large-scale urbanisation projects found on the support of state capital, institutes and technology has brought into existence a racist orientalism whose immediate revelation is its argument for material civilisation. The idea of reforming and modernising Tibet articulates a form of Sino-orientalism, sometimes referred to as neo-orientalism. This brand of orientalism converges with Enlightenment ideology and as such is an orientalist mimesis that appears in a language of support, protection and patronage. Such internal orientalism has its foreign supporters. The American “China hand” Ezra F. Vogel, for example, in his recent book *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, considers the Tibetans to be anti-modernisers, and their current predicament as having derived from their resistance to the PRC’s effort to “draw Tibet toward greater integration into the national economy and culture” (Vogel 522). This is probably a reference to the central government’s fiscal support of Tibet. In 1980, Hu Yaobang, then the Secretary-General of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), visited Tibet and said in Lhasa that since 1951 the Central government had injected into Tibet a total of 4.5 billion RMB, nearly 100 times more than the Tibetan government’s total tax revenue over the same period of time. Moreover, this does not include the government’s investment in its infrastructure such as roads, railways, airports, hospitals, schools etc. These figures, oft-cited as evidence of how Tibet has benefited

²¹ China as a whole has been paying a heavy price for the reforms. For one thing, the underprivileged Han Chinese in the coastal regions, too, are victims of the country’s neo-liberal economic practices. These victims include the urban poor, peasant-migrant workers, the unemployed, deracinated local residents for property redevelopments, and bearers of epidemic corruption and state thuggery. It is estimated that those who petition for justice for themselves or for their abused relatives amount to regularly one million each year; they are what the media refers to as *shangfang zhe* (上訪者) – petitioners hanging on in Beijing to appeal to the authorities for the correction of cases of injustice. Truthful as this figure is, such an observation and argument – that Tibetans should not be immune to the forces of modernisation – has no place in any defensive discourse of state policy and market reform. Han victims are certainly victims of the reform; but its widespread injustice is no reason to justify inequalities between Tibetans and Hans. The suffering here is no legitimization of suffering there, or vice versa; not to mention that the situation in Tibet, in effect, is far worse than the rest of China. In addition to its internal class inequalities, the regional, historical and ethnic divergences between Tibet-Qinghai plateau and South-Eastern China have also contributed to the deepening social inequalities with far-reaching political and social consequences.

from “economic opportunities generated by inputs of Chinese economic assistance to Tibet” (Vogel 522), are an uncanny reminder of “the white man’s burden” that legitimated, moralised and motivated nineteenth-century imperialism as an Enlightenment and humanitarian project.

The PRC’s own Orientalised history must have a direct bearing on its present understanding of its relations with the world, especially the West. Sino-orientalism, manifest at a time when its dramatic rise on the international scene is one of triumphant modernity, has enabled its triumphant coming-back, with a vengeance, after a prolonged time of perceived humiliations and dire defeats. In this discourse of modernity, Tibet assumes the role of an anomaly, a deviant and an Other to the PRC’s present social and economic projects. It legitimates the flattening of regional divergences and the “transformation” of Tibet, not just for its own survival but also for demonstration of the success of the Chinese model of modernity. Sino-orientalism thrives on the country’s expansionism and influence on the global stage. It is about present-day China in relation to the world, and in relation to itself – to its past and to its neighbouring peoples in particular. Its critique of external orientalism conceals and masquerades a nationalism; it is an alibi for nationalism and empire.

The nationalism of Han on the mainland bears formal similarities to the regionalism of Hong Kongers in the SAR in the way they are both sustained by global capital, legitimated by the discourse of modernity and made possible by colonial civility, whether Anglo-European or Sino-orientalist. The etymology and current borrowing of the word “locust,” when applied to circulate and consolidate a certain aspect of “Chinese character,” make clear the ground for comparison between the two cases of racialism. For one thing, HK people’s hate remarks about mainland travellers are comparable to some of the worst racist slurs that we would encounter today only in the historical and imaginative recreation of the racist movement against the Chinese in the Euro-American world in late 19th and early 20th centuries. In his travel journal, Archibald John Little (1838-1908), who spent years in what is now Chongqing and on the Tibetan border in the late 1890s, remarked on the Chinese character in nearly the same terms as those Hong Kongers employ in the 21st century. Quoting Father Armand David (1826-1900), Little wrote in 1901 that “this locust-like propensity of the Chinese” seeks to

destroy every green thing wherever they penetrate, for when the trees are gone comes the turn of the scrub and bushes, then the grass, and at last the roots, until, finally, the rain washes down the accumulated soil of ages, and only barren rocks remain. (qtd. in Little 257)

The cosmopolitan Hong Kongers who exalt ethics of liberal capitalism value cosmopolitan civility as a badge of status: they show that they are citizens of the

world and of means connected to global resources and standards. Even as the Han throw themselves ardently into the historical process of global economic modernisation, so much so that they engage in comparable racist activities against the Tibetans as Euro-Americans once did to the Han, and their HK counterparts do now, these mainlanders as of this decade, when they come to HK, are still “uncivilised” “locusts.” When a sizable number of members in a socio-political community appear to make stages of global capitalist advancement the measure of civility, can we imagine how the State would give economic developments undivided attention, so that, in Arif Dirlik’s words, “the freedom to consume and get rich,” might be used to overwrite a people’s desires for freedom and democratic sentiments – both of which “legacies of colonial acculturation that Mainlanders had missed out on?” (Dirlik 2014) *Note well, material civilisation is one shared root of both HK and mainland (Han) Chinese practice of “racism.” Were it possible for mainlanders to catch up with or bypass the “material civilisation” of “liberal capitalism,” including that which is now neoliberal in form, HK’s “racialism” would become a vacuous resistance.*

Some Remarks on the Pathos and Usefulness of “Racism”

The anti-mainlander sentiments in HK are, in part, a barbarous expression of the uneasy process in which two kinds of capital – liberal-capitalist capital of the colonial legacy and PRC State capitalism that came of age lately – emerged at the turn of the 21st century to incorporate, sustain and contest each other. The difficulties resulting from such a process began to escalate as soon as the Qing government ceded HK to Britain in 1842, making HK the battlefield of two empires who were competing for control, rule and supremacy under different political and social principles. The founding of the PRC served as another decisive moment in the history of this process. Not only was HK an actual Cold-War theatre of the Cold War, albeit a regional one, but also it showcased an ideological counter-example of the mainland’s choice of socialism and its ideological practice that led to social unrest and economic stagnation. At the heart of HK’s discriminative discourse and mentality is the ideal of liberal and cosmopolitan capitalism, symbolised by the “Brand HK” slogan “Asia’s world city.”²² In the wake of the 1997 Handover, HK was anxious to brand itself as “Asia’s World City” – an attempt to postulate itself as a global city *away* from

²² In his 1999 Policy Address, the then Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa positioned HK as “Asia’s world city.” Subsequently, the Chief Executive’s Commission on Strategic Development promoted HK as “one of the most cosmopolitan and vibrant cities in Asia to a wide range of international audiences,” kicking off a “Brand HK” programme in 2001 that targeted at achieving “a number of key economic, social and cultural objectives.” The programme, launched by Tung at the FORTUNE Global Forum held in HK, brought together 500 of the world’s most influential business leaders, including former US President Bill Clinton (Tung, paragraph 44; see also Chu).

global China.²³ Such an attempt seeks to not only poise the metropolis between China and the world but also find for HK an indisputable place in the global financial system that recognises a uniquely HK identity, politically, socially and economically. HK has longed to have a clear global identity and status. This is the version of HK, which former chief executive Tung Chee-hwa held up before the public as the PRC was preparing to receive HK:

Hong Kong lags behind other international world-class cities in many respects, in particular human capital and living environment. However, we should not forget our unique advantages. We have the thriving Mainland next to us. *We are a melting pot for Chinese and Western cultures.* We are a highly liberal and open society. Our institutions are well established. With such a strong foundation, we should be able to build on our strengths and develop modern and knowledge-intensive industries, erect new pillars in our economy and open up new and better prospects. (Tung, paragraph 45; my emphasis)

Nothing is said here about the kind of fuel and cost required for bringing the “melting pot” of HK to a boil.²⁴ Tung did not state what would become of HK society when two sources of global capital “melt” in an area of merely 1,104 km² in which as many as 7.15 million people conduct their everyday life. Or what effects the grand State plans, experiments and projects would have upon individuals conducting lives at the most mundane level. There is little concern with the operations of life once thrown into the vortex of the PRC’s “transformation” into a lead agency within global capitalism, and once Hong Kongers become bearers of the new intricate role that the PRC uses to exploit and extend the relations of globalisation.²⁵ The PRC has embraced global capitalism and extended the logic of it to experiment its own economic workshops in the world. Its enlightenment orientalism demonstrates the power and force of global capitalism that is not managed by just one state, but by a global structure of capital as empire.

²³ Chu Yiu-wai observes that “[t]he exploration of this branding strategy,” which “can be traced back to 1996,” came from “an anxiety of becoming another Chinese city after 1997” (Chu 71).

²⁴ The term *melting pot* is a popularly adopted by the mass media, merchandisers and eateries to describe HK. In its policy report of the city, the SAR government’s “Commission on Strategic Development” also uses the term “a melting pot for Chinese and Western cultures” to envision the identity and image of HK in Asia and the world (Commission on Strategic Development 33).

²⁵ The PRC’s transformed role in global politics of the 21st century is best reflected in the concept of the so-called “China model.” The idea of the China model has been in vogue for some time now. *The New York Times* has published a collection of views on the China model as alternative to liberal democracy, from Confucian constitutionalism to Chinese socialism. See Daniel Bell and Jiang Qing on Confucian constitution and Zhang Wei-wei on the ideas underlying the China model (Zhang 20008, 2009, 2012). For critical response to the talks about China model, see Dirlik, Elliot, Hung, and The Oxford Consensus 2013.

Much as HK people desire each – affluence, civility of a sort and benefits and status of a global city – none of these, when tainted by regionalism and racialism, could help HK achieve the cosmopolitan spirit of the city or legitimate the fruits of the struggle for economic sustenance and democracy. Let us be clear about what I am saying. The behaviour of HK people towards migrants and visitors from the mainland has become fully racialised. Racism is both a structure of attitude and a mode of life practice. We have learned from the European disasters of the last century that racism exists not just between so-called “races” or “ethnic groups,” but also within the same or closely related “ethnic groups.” The exiled German historian, George Mosse, writing during the period of the Adenauer economic miracle, showed how such “intra group” racism emerged and existed. Mosse called this, “mystical racism,” in his studies of the intellectual origin of German Nazism. Mosse is concerned with European racism within white Europe, especially Nazi fascist racism that developed in the 1930s and entailed devastating consequences for European Jews.²⁶ “Mystical racism” conceptualises a special kind of hierarchy that categorises ethnic, national and “racial” groups into an order of things. In Mosse’s schema, racism hierarchizes social order, allowing the powerful to classify, order and rank elements of the species, eventually denying the humanity of many people and groups. Where there were scientific racist distinctions among whites – for example, those who were Slavs were lesser than Aryans – within these distinctions there existed a hierarchical order of another level that was crucial for the classifying and ordering of the cultural regions. “Mystical racism,” in short, is the term Mosse invented to name the structure of consciousness politically produced after World War I and intensified as State ideology by the Nazis. It worked “mystically,” that is, it acquired a quasi-divine doctrinal legitimacy that corrupted the society and enabled war and genocide. “Germans” emerged as a fictionally unified group, falsely imagined as an organic unity with an entrenched belief in an *a priori* unity among members of the group and with an attached “living space.” This historical case of the “Germans” has now become a major legacy of fascist thinking.²⁷ Scholars may

²⁶ In his *Toward the Final Solution*, Mosse attempts to deal with an enduring question: how was it possible for the German people as a national or racial collective to support and participate in the murder of 6 million European Jews in this systematic organised manner?

²⁷ “Fascist” is an Anglicisation of an Italian word itself derived from the Latin word, *fascēs*. The term and symbol predates modern totalitarian fascism, referring to any group, normally male, organised intentionally around political groupings. Due to its deep relation to politics, fascism often manifests itself in the form of racist nationalism or nationalistic racism. Extreme nationalism is a romantic legacy, and it feeds fascism in the way it would prioritise one nation over others and legitimise national aggression on the basis of racial physiognomy where physical differences are immediate and verifiable or in terms of cultural divergences (including in particular linguistic identity) within the same racial group. When pushed to the extreme, this racist nationalism could amount to a radical civic religion in which one must have total and uncompromised faith. In the late 19th century, for example, Aryan nationalism embraced “mystical racism,” culminating in

disagree over the precise definition and classification of fascism, but there would be little disagreement over some of its defining features. Although not all racists are fascists, racism is a defining feature of all fascism; it provides a structure to ease over the “seemingly contradictory combination of extreme elitism and mass mobilization, emphasizing hierarchy and the leadership principle, positively valuing violence to some extent as end as well as means, and tending to normalize war and/or military virtues” (Payne 124). A collaborative act of elitism and popular violence is an expression of a state-manipulated kind of racism, a hallmark of fascism and is exercised through and enabled by the establishment of a *popular* sovereignty.

In HK, the notion of Chinese national sovereignty is rarely popular. I therefore do not mean to suggest that Hong Kongers are squarely or undeniably “fascist” even if a fraction of HK society has no moral qualms about availing themselves of public activities, slurs and behaviours that resemble racist fascism in manners. Rather, I mean to draw attention to the changing nature of HK’s anti-mainland sentiment, from one founded on the myth of historical colonial modernity to one becoming ever subjugated to Chinese corporate-state capital. Since the turn of the century, Hong Kongers have from time to time indulged themselves in “singing” abusive songs about mainlanders.²⁸ Yet, unlike earlier forms of “mystic racism” that Hong Kongers practiced against the Ar-Chans in the 1980s or that Han Chinese are carrying out in Tibet now, these “locust songs” characteristic of current HK’s anti-mainland dramatic exhibitions do not have state policy or power behind them. They are a kind of insincere sincerity. The case of Hong Kongers making outrageous comments on the death of a 25-year-old mainlander, Stephanie Liu Han, who enrolled at HKU on a full scholarship in 2006 and joined Ernest & Young shortly before her death, is a good case in point. As Liu’s friends and HKU alumni posted news on social media sites to express condolences, the gross comments on Facebook, on other such popular local online fora as “HK Golden” and on *Apple Daily* dismayed them. These comments, several hundreds of them, were a mixture, ranging from angry rants to celebrations of the truck driver’s deed and the death of Liu herself. Here are some of the comments:

I can only say it is indeed a tragedy, but compassion can’t make us ignore the fact that she came to HK to grab our education resources since she was not a permanent resident. Hope her family pays for the hospital fee; otherwise, it’s not fair to us taxpayers.

Nazi ideologies/myths about the Aryan or the Nordic race being a perfect model of human species within Europe (see Mayall 112).

²⁸ This is literal. In early 2011, HK netizens rewrote lyrics of the pop singer Eason Chan’s “Under Mount Fuji” 富士山下 to become the most notorious song of HK – “Locust World.” See performance and lyrics of the song (also in English) in “badcanto” (blogger).

Actually, she is really lucky. If this had happened in the mainland, she would be dead already. At least in HK, she will be taken to the ICU!

Truck driver, you've done a good job. (Qtd. from Huang)

Worthy of attention is the counterattack from mainlanders. To rebuke the comment “[Hong Kongers] do not hate without reasons,” a blogger remarks on HK society’s fascist tendency on Baidu 百度, a mainland-based weblog: “I guess there are also justifications behind the murderous hatred of Hitler and Nazism that is responsible for the death of sixty hundred thousand Jews” (Blogger). My present purpose is to show HK’s recent anti-mainlander sentiments emerge from and represent pathetic more than mystical racism. It embodies the pathos, which no one should dismiss in the HK-mainland relationship. This pathos allows mainlanders their own “justification” to reciprocate their racist HK cousins, albeit with a racism more mystical than pathetic. While we can point out this reciprocity of racism between Hong Kongers and mainlanders, we must also differentiate between its forms and functions.

In conclusion, two factors make contemporary HK society’s racism kindred to Han’s racism against Tibetans and yet affectively different. It is neither “mystic” nor “fascist” in content, first because of the historical conjunction between 19th century colonialism and social segregation, second, because unlike Han racism, HK racism has become ever more *pathetic* in the absence of sustained or organised power interests. While it is correct to call HK’s historical relation to global capital to account, in part, for the city’s anti-mainland sentiments, there is no – or no longer – a monopoly of concentrated power for the sentiments. HK’s racialist campaigns against mainland visitors, as an inverted response to the PRC’s “mystic racism,” annihilate not so much the mainlanders but the power of racism itself. “If I’m worried that my service or what I’m entitled to is being taken away... then of course there’s resentment,” said Elaine Chan, an academic at HKU who has done research on post-Handover HK identity and social issues (Pomfret and Tang). “When you get to a certain point, people may just say enough is enough. I have to do something or I have to say something[.] We’re probably almost there” (qtd. in Pomfret and Tang). These grievances are as real as are the civil counterparts of some of the “locust talks.” That the weaker (HK) should repay the aggression of the stronger (PRC) with aggression of a kind is not only a cosmic fact; it is an ethnic group struggling for identity and space by an honourable liberal process. The rough expressions of Hong Kongers, by their admixture with the sentiments of global capital, give rise to bitter resistance. These expressions are, to borrow from G. Wilson Knight his comments on *King Lear*, “a chorus of acclamations”;

they are “childish, foolish – but very human” (Knight 161). They are the contents of that racialism which has been pouring itself out in the current decade with incredible urban creativity and vengeance. For example: the term *qiangguo* (強國 strong country), originated in Xi Jinping’s “dream” of a “rich and strong China” – a desire he articulated two weeks after his appointment as the CCP’s general secretary and military commander-in-chief – enters into HK’s urban dictionary to mean “China” with a derogatory and satirical turn (*The Economist*). According to the *Dictionary of Politically Incorrect HK Cantonese*, this term “contains the meaning of *jinyuqiwai, baixuqizhong* 金玉其外，敗絮其中，” i.e. China is only fair without foul within (*Dictionary of Politically Incorrect Hong Kong Cantonese*).

HK’s latest wave of democratic movements and struggles has brought out, above all else, the pathos of the local anti-mainland sentiments. The protesters of what some have now agreed to call HK’s “Umbrella Democracy Movement” of October 2014,²⁹ among them mostly high school and university students working under the leadership of the HK Federation of Students, have won the heart of the international community by being “the world’s politest protesters” (Popovic and Porell).³⁰ They have put on display the triumph and pathos of a non-violent form of protest that calls to mind Martin Luther King Jr.’s commitment to love – sit-ins, road-blockings and non-resistant style of confrontation with both the police who uses teargas and social elements that oppose with street violence their peaceful struggle for freedom.

In view of HK’s emerging situation and the “Umbrella Democracy Movement,” the questions that we must consider lie at two interrelating levels. First, how might “racism” act as a potential threat to freedom and equality? Not so long ago, Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights activists in the US correctly argued that the “Jim Crow laws” of racial segregation (1876-1965) were in effect institutionalised and legitimised by processes of democratic elections at the local and state level. The southern whites were complicit in and supportive of racist beliefs, behaviours and laws. Any similar search for a way to erect a democracy that would prevent such barbaric behaviour as racism to become dominant by majority rule applies in HK today where a majority of Hong Kongers would prefer to oust the mainlanders. In other words, political democracy requires cultural development – the cultivation, correction and education of the people – without which, the threat of racism could give

²⁹ As events are still arising out of what is by large “an unscripted pro-democracy movement,” there is resistance to calling the event a “revolution” (Yeung).

³⁰ See also the picture essay on HK’s “Umbrella Democracy Movement,” which captures what the authors call the “astounding restraint” of the protest (Saman).

theoretical and ideological sanction to the very liberal democracy that the people of HK so value and exalt.

Second, in relation to racism being a challenge to the validity of liberal democracy, how might power and interests make use of “racism” and the state apparatus – schools, laws, cultural institutions, social and new media, state and grand narratives – to produce and reproduce racism to their own ends? As in the case of the Han Chinese’s seemingly “mystical” racism, “racism,” as such, sustains authoritarian state policies and plans. In the case of HK, how might state propaganda and politics threaten to not only confine and belittle the local struggle for regional autonomy to the pleasure of some unleashed pathetic emotions, but also reform and transform it into resources for regional jealousy and divisions? To that end, jealousy and divisions may flower into indignation not hostile to authority and state interests and as such ready the mind for “truths” of the socio-economic structure within which Chinese State power finds a way to divide and rule. *Financial Times*, in reporting the “Umbrella Democracy Movement,” makes clear that the PRC has capitalised on the anti-mainland sentiments in the PRC, playing on popular resentment and jealousy:

Plenty of other mainland Chinese see developments in HK through a more chauvinistic lens, jealous of the special treatment the territory has received and bitter at the students’ apparent ingratitude for Beijing’s favors. ‘Why should this news be blocked?’ one person asked in a typical comment on Weibo, China’s Twitter equivalent. ‘Every Chinese person should know what kind of contemptuous wolf has been raised in HK.’ (Sevastopulo and Mitchell)

This comment reflects the mind of a jealous child who is not alone in the mainland in condemning the “privileged” rather than asking the Mother for the same “privileges” (see also, for example, Sheehan). This attitude is the outcome of the PRC’s contemporary version of “mystic racism,” which stokes up nationalism and resentment towards all outside the PRC (including HK). Modern governmentality manifests itself best in processes of subjugation – in the production of subjectivity and subject positions: the “race” card, so to speak, easily provides state apparatuses the discursive space in which it organises, instigates and sustains racism, whether “mystic” or “pathetic,” as operations of weakness and despair in the face of democratic challenges.

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