

Preface

This exploratory monograph and associated repertoire of visual data and sociological observations examines how the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has been visually re-imagined, transformed, and utilized by its subalterns in the post-Handover period to reproduce their aspirations and demands for greater democracy and social justice while simultaneously contesting China's hegemonic pressures under the "one country, two systems" ideology. As a special enclave within the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong has enjoyed limited democratic and liberal freedoms such as freedom of speech, press, and protest for 17 years after returning to Chinese sovereignty. The Special Administrative Region is also the only part of the People's Republic where multi-party democratic elections and commemorations of the 1989 Tiananmen incident are permitted and remains the source of democratic inspiration for many on the mainland.

Though China has largely abided by the strictures of the "one country, two systems" approach, the implementation of the symbolic moral universe has been increasingly stressed by contestations over expanding inequality, contentious political reform, social justice, and compelled cultural, economic, and political integration with China. With more than 50,000 protests of varying sizes and issues having occurred since the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in July 1997, the community has come to visually embody the label, the "city of protests." Moreover, Hong Kong's dominated classes have actively and vividly contested past, current, and future narratives of the city as they seek to subversively and visually co-opt key cultural, economic, social, and political venues of the city in their rejection of the ruling regime's efforts to visualize Hong Kong simply as an economic, not political, metropolis on the periphery of China.

This monograph seeks to provide a thick visual description and narrative of how Hong Kong's many repressed social and political actors have struggled to make their voices visible in the post-Handover period. Following the rise of image saturated contentious postmodern and new social movement politics in recent years, 2010 forward is contemplated with emphasis on the 2012 to mid-2014 period which arguably represents a watershed in Hong Kong's counter-hegemonic resistance to Chinese domination over the territory. As will be demonstrated, though Hong Kong's democracy movement has been one of its most important and prominent it is not the sum of Hong Kong's protest culture.

Before embarking on this visual exploration, I need to thank the people of Hong Kong—the tens and hundreds of thousands of activists, demonstrators, protesters, and supporters—who ultimately made this monograph possible through their inspirational embodied visual inscriptions of cultural, economic, political, and social claims on the fabric of the city. They epitomize the subaltern struggle to be seen in a contemporary Hong Kong where oppressive economic and political hegemonic visualizations of the territory and its relationship with its sovereign remain intensely contested. Rather than a liability to Hong Kong's prosperity and stability, they are an invaluable asset in giving life to the "one country, two systems" notion. Concomitantly, I am grateful to Dr. Wing-Chung Ho for encouragement in incorporating my photographic and visual observations of Hong Kong's civil and political societies into my dissertation and other scholarly projects. His advice provided the initial impetus for this monograph: a conference paper, *Protest in the City: Counter-hegemonic Resistance in China's Hong Kong*, which I presented at the International Visual Sociological Association annual conference in 2012. Likewise, I am highly appreciative of my Ph.D. supervisors Drs. Tit-Wing Lo and Tak-Yan Lee, and panel members, Drs. Raymond Kwok-Hong Chan and Chris King-Chi Chan, all of whom have knowingly and unknowingly provided important and inspirational feedback throughout my time as a Ph.D. student at City University of Hong Kong. Sincere thanks are also due to Springer for publishing this monograph and to the great staff of Springer Asia, Ms. Jayanthie Krishnan, Ms. Kanako Tanaka, and Mr. Vishal Daryanomet for their cooperation, patience, and support in realizing this project. Relatedly, the anonymous reviewers are thanked for their advice and contributions in improving this work. Finally, I would like to thank my family (Jessie, Travis, Jenny, and Carter)—and especially Haiqing—for their support and sacrifices as I worked on this manuscript and my Ph.D. But most of all, I would like to thank my mother, an artist and photographer herself, who—in many more ways than one—gave me the sight to see. I remain indebted to others not mentioned here due to space and though not mentioned by name, their support is not forgotten.

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Visualizing Protest in the City

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