

I hope, will stimulate more interpretations and discussions of China's revolutionary classical-style poets – including, but not limited to, the four poets illuminated here – and their contested legacies.

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Hong Kong in the Cold War

Edited by PRISCILLA ROBERTS and JOHN M. CARROLL

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When I first went to Hong Kong in the summer of 1965, I stayed for the first few weeks in a small flat in Boundary Street. Close to the Universities Services Centre, apart from the fact that the air conditioning was too noisy for sleep, this was an ideal place from which to get on with doctoral research. There was, however, one curious condition attached to this arrangement. Once a week (Fridays I think), I was requested to vacate the flat for the evening, during which a group of gentlemen assembled for a banquet. These gentlemen were the governing core of the Mencius Foundation for Education, which probably owned the flat. My go-between with the Foundation certainly had the high level of culture suitable for a person associated with such a finely named institution, and when I left he presented me with a calligraphic scroll of Tang poetry that he had written in memory of my stay.

What I had no clue about at the time, however, was that my hosts in Boundary Street had a significant financial line into the US Government. This line passed through the CIA and the Asia Foundation and supplied the funds needed to support their work. Similarly, when I started teaching a course at the Chinese University in the following Spring, I was quite unaware of the role of my Boundary Street team in supporting – basically for political reasons – the founding of this major institution, which at the time was barely three years old.

I learned all this, and much more, from reading this admirable collection of papers on *Hong Kong in the Cold War*.

Most of the papers in the book were originally written for a conference at the University of Hong Kong. While the choice of papers and the editing are excellent, it would have helped most readers if they had been offered a clearer framework of the meaning of a Cold War and what, more precisely, the book was attempting to cover.

The papers actually relate to *two* Cold Wars, which may be broadly defined as the United States and Allies against the Soviet Union, and the United States and Allies against the People's Republic of China (PRC). These conflicts had important points of interaction and similarity, but different time frames. The Soviet war started in 1947/48 and finished its first major phase with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. The PRC war started in 1949, and began to thaw after the Shanghai Communiqué of 1972 and America's withdrawal from Vietnam two years later. Whether, in spite of a high degree of diplomatic and economic normalization, this conflict has ever ceased is currently a

subject of serious debate (see Odd Arne Westad, “The sources of Chinese conduct: Are Washington and Beijing fighting a new Cold War?” *Foreign Affairs*, Sept.-Oct. 2019).

Both Cold Wars had at their centre a city: Berlin (and briefly also Vienna), and Hong Kong. But the city “battlefields” were very different. Berlin was a physically divided and contested space, which the Soviets used (unsuccessfully) to frustrate Western efforts to create a new democratic West German state and a revived economy (for a first-hand account of the grim early stages of the Berlin Cold War see, General Lucius D. Clay, *Decision in Germany*, New York: Doubleday, 1950). Hong Kong, on the other hand, was in some ways a much more complex situation, offering a relatively open arena for all combatants with conflicts in trade unions, schools, the presses, and even in violent street fights.

Since several papers take the story “post-Cold War” (up to 2016), in many ways the book is an admirable collection of material on Hong Kong’s post-1949 history.

During the 1950s and 1960s at least five or six significant players were competing in Hong Kong for political, economic, ideological and cultural advantage. These included: the PRC, the Taiwan Nationalists, the United States, the local Colonial Government and the British Government in London. There were also many NGOs, churches and other charitable bodies who felt they had something to contribute to Hong Kong, and even a small but important group of the “uncommitted” – who were mainly Chinese refugees.

For the general picture the papers by the Priscilla Roberts and Tracy Steel are particularly helpful. But the most unexpected and revealing papers are those dealing with the propaganda and cultural wars; with Hong Kong as a theatre for intelligence gathering and espionage; and with people’s experiences of the dilemmas of cultural and personal identity (Priscilla Roberts, Lu Xun, Glen Petersen and Stacilee Ford).

A key institution in the thick of the propaganda, cultural and espionage wars was the United States Consulate. This book has many fine black and white photographs, among which one of the most evocative is that of the old Consulate building, with its low profile and low slung oriental appearance – all sadly later replaced by a mini-fortress when the pressure for migration to the United States generated confrontational demands on the Consulate staff.

The scale and scope of the Consulate’s work and of the United States Information Service (USIS) were extraordinary. During the height of the Cold Wars a third of the global USIS budget was diverted to Asia, and Hong Kong was not simply a target in its own right, but the regional hub from which hundreds of thousands of magazines, Chinese-language and translated books of all kinds were distributed throughout East and South East Asia. (While all this was in full swing, we in London lost our USIS library in Grosvenor Square – this seemed a serious error at the time, since the resources freed were often re-allocated to capital cities in Asia where mobs repeatedly burned the USIS libraries to the ground.)

Another institution, now lost in history, but of great interest was ARCI (Aid for Chinese Refugee Intellectuals). One of the many organizations engaged in refugee relief, Glen Petersen shows how the ARCI was not only helping the intellectuals, but like so many organizations in the period had a hidden agenda, in this case that of trying to place the intellectuals in locations where they might form points of resistance against local communist advances.

Overall, with the hindsight of three years, some of these papers seem rather too optimistic about Hong Kong’s post-1997 future. David Meyer, for example, is confident that Hong Kong’s roles as a pivot of global finance and a regional centre for the management of companies with strong East Asian interests, are unlikely to be

overtaken by rivals. However, while many built-in advantages remain, if the prospects for the Hong Kong economy were to weaken, the city's key advantages would also be bound to suffer.

Wang Gungwu also expresses confidence in the future, seeing Hong Kong as a source of new ideas and solutions to difficult mainland problems. But this role is surely dependent on two factors: the success of the “two systems” strategy generally, and the efforts to merge Hong Kong within a new, south China regional economy. The latter is a vision that calls for easy regional mobility of managerial and technical skills, an idea which even before the political crisis of 2019 had been slow to get off the drawing board; but which now, in current conditions, looks very problematic.

If there is a general weakness in the book, it is that the authors are strong on Hong Kong but less so on domestic Chinese politics – a very long-standing weakness among the Hong Kong elite. Wang Gungwu in his introductory paper, for example, comments that, “In fact, during the 1960s, it became obvious that what the PRC stood for was a more isolationist China rather than a progressive step towards global integration” (p. 7). This is a misleading simplification, for what may have been obvious to some, was certainly not so to others.

There was in fact important history between the end of the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution. The key to this were the years from 1962 to early 1966 when Zhou Enlai, to replace the losses sustained by the break with the Soviets, began turning almost every dimension of Chinese development towards Japan and Europe. It was not accidental that in September 1965, ICI, then a giant British chemicals and whole plant vendor, held the largest overseas trade fair in its history in Tianjin – selling a massive plant on the first day of the event. (Information supplied to the author by ICI staff in Tianjin at the time.) Nor was it accidental that, by the summer of 1966, Beijing was overrun by Japanese groups being shown around and hoovering up antiques in the Liu Li Chang. Nor, that scholars such as Anthony Dicks and myself were able to make multiple, month-long visits to China, and did so under the terms of an internal regulatory framework newly devised to facilitate visits by foreigners of all kinds. These outward looking initiatives were fully supported by Mao, who while always insisting on self-reliance, was at the same time urging the Chinese not only to study Japanese technology, but also to learn from Japanese management techniques. This phase came to an abrupt end on 16 May 1966, but had important long-term implications.

In one sense, however, the details and content apart, this book is important because it illustrates that Hong Kong historians and others around the world concerned about Hong Kong are active and producing high-quality work. In a world where historians are increasingly threatened by fake news on the one side, and by phony, ever-changing historical narratives on the other, maintaining these standards will be as important for Hong Kong's future as any other achievement that one could think of.

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