

literacy primers for peasants, and spoken drama. Nevertheless, in framing the book in such a way, Zhang takes an opportunity to blur the distinction between the literary, cinematic or artistic representations and the empirical reality portrayed by historians, anthropologists and sociologists, which are often seen as being at odds. The juxtapositions of various generic texts, containing both canonical and noncanonical materials, can generate new interpretations of the rural imaginations, reveal new connections between representation and reality, as well as display the intersection of “going to the countryside” and larger social, historical and political changes.

All scholars in Chinese studies, including film, literature and cultural studies, should take a look at this book, not least for the fine method that draws upon a wide and diverse range of readings of novel texts to ask significant questions about Chinese modernization and urbanization. It sheds light on urgent current issues and events related to China’s urban–rural integration and disparity. The ongoing mass migration of Chinese peasants from the countryside to the city, voluntarily or involuntarily, suggests an inevitable trend of the transformation of agrarian society to industrial society. Will the ambitious governmental goal of achieving “strong agriculture, beautiful countryside, and rich peasants” by 2050 stimulate an entirely new trend or understanding of “going to the countryside”?

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*Memories of Tiananmen: Politics and Processes of Collective Remembering in Hong Kong, 1989–2019*

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Francis Lee and Joseph Chan have been scrutinizing the intersection between media and social movements in Hong Kong for the past two decades. Based on a wealth of surveys, interviews and sampling of media reports, the present volume represents the summation of many years of research on the commemoration of June Fourth in Hong Kong, and it is undoubtedly set to become the scholarly work of reference on the topic.

The introduction establishes the transformative value of the events of 1989 for Hong Kong, which “ignited local public support for democratization” (p. 17). Rather than as a “counter-memory” like on the mainland, the commemoration in Hong Kong is characterized as a “socially dominant collective memory challenging state power” (p. 21). Not unlike a social movement, Hongkongers’ “collective memory” of June Fourth is envisaged as a series of processes: memory formation, memory mobilization, intergenerational transmission, institutionalization, memory challenge and repair, and memory balkanization (under the effect of social media fragmentation). These processes are to some extent coterminous with five chronological stages that have unfolded consecutively over the 30-year period studied by the authors (pp. 35–36).

Memory formation (chapter two) is closely connected to the original emotional involvement of the Hong Kong public in the events of 1989. Subsequently, the view of Hong Kong as “China’s conscience” came to be valued as a moral imperative

in the lead-up to the handover, and again in the years around the twentieth anniversary. The sustainability of the commemoration also relied closely on the annual cycle of memory mobilization (chapter three), relayed by social organizations and civic groups like the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China (“the Alliance”). Intergenerational transmission (chapter four) was an essential mechanism for inducting new participants. The family setting and media discourse played an important role in transmitting the moral dimension of the memory of Tiananmen and rebutting “memory-blurring discourses” that challenged its value. However, the authors also note that it proved easier to transmit the cognitive memory than the emotive memory of 1989 to some members of the younger cohorts. Memory institutionalization (chapter five) took place through school curricula, memorials or museums: Tiananmen was included in the secondary school Chinese history curriculum in 2004 (though its presentation was often ambiguous) and was often discussed in liberal studies courses from 2009. Memorials on university campuses and the June Fourth Museum established by the Alliance further raised the awareness of students, although these sites remained contested.

From around 2013, the commemoration was challenged by the rise of “localism,” which in reply provoked discourses of “memory repair” (chapter six). A decoupling trend between local and national identification, as well as a controversy around the choice of slogan for the 2013 vigil entailed a full-fledged questioning of the original connection between the struggle for democracy in China and in Hong Kong. Yet, as the authors lucidly point out on the basis of several detailed surveys, the impact of localism may have been exaggerated (p. 199). Rather than a turn away from commemorating 1989, the critiques arguably led to rearticulating the significance of 1989 for the local community (p. 218). In this connection, it can be useful to distinguish between different “generational units” (Mannheim) within a cohort (chapter seven). Localists did not suddenly become dominant after 2014, nor was there a single “localist” view of the significance of the vigil. A series of in-depth interviews reveal a spectrum of attitudes among the younger participants. Rather than the result of a political split, the relative decline in participation might also be the outcome of a growing sense of political ineffectiveness since 2018 and a withdrawal from public life that is shared across political boundaries (pp. 249–50). Most recently, the rise of social media significantly impacted the collective remembering of Tiananmen (chapter eight). The increasing fragmentation of digital communities empowered pro-government criticism of the commemoration after 2014, which in turn led to an increased polarization of public opinion. By early 2018, the first calls appeared to ban the commemoration or at least some of the slogans used by the Alliance, a threat which was carried out in 2020.

The book ends with a conclusion and an epilogue. The conclusion highlights the status of the Tiananmen commemoration as a perceived moral imperative and the resilience of the collective memory of 1989 in Hong Kong up to 2019. This resilience can be explained by an informal coalition of “custodians of conscience” (journalists, educators, etc.). Citing Tai-lok Lui’s *Four Generations of Hong Kong People (Si dai Xianggang ren, 2007)*, the authors highlight the stability of the coalition up to and including the “post-materialist” fourth generation born around the 1980s. A shift arguably arose in the “fifth generation” born after the handover, who “were not challenging the content of the collective memory of Tiananmen [but] were less likely to give moral weight to the collective memory” (p. 297). Yet, although the link with China became more tenuous, the vigil remained intimately connected to Hong Kong’s dual status as a Chinese and global city. “The collective memory generated and sustained was for Hong Kong, for China, and for the world” (p. 308) and could thus arguably survive some de-linkage with China. However, as the authors

acknowledge in the epilogue (added in late 2020), the National Security Law adopted in 2020 has largely undermined the conditions under which collective memory was previously sustained. Intergenerational transmission (education), mobilization (media) and institutionalization (social organizations) have all been targeted by the Law, not to mention the vigil itself, which has been banned since 2020. As envisaged by the authors (p. 328), the Alliance too has now been charged under the NSL. In this context, the collective memory is likely to increasingly resemble the “counter-memory” that survives in authoritarian contexts like mainland China.

*Memories of Tiananmen* is a landmark scholarly work, which adopts a social-science perspective to study a movement that was crucial to Hong Kong society for several decades. Clearly written and rigorously argued, it is recommended reading for anyone interested in Hong Kong and its complex connections with mainland China. Based on a wealth of data and always nuanced and balanced in its arguments, the book itself represents a kind of monument to the collective memory of 1989 that is now rapidly being erased under the new political circumstances.

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*A Time of Lost Gods: Mediumship, Madness and the Ghost after Mao*

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The “time” in *A Time of Lost Gods* is written in the singular, but Emily Ng’s study of the spectral Mao in spirit medium altars and in psychiatric wards actually shows us multiple times of lost gods. Gods, along with ghosts and other dangerous spirits, were literally lost during the high Maoist period. According to Ng’s interlocutors in what she calls Hexian County of Henan Province, all such spirits disappeared during the height of Mao’s power, because Mao’s sovereign power made them irrelevant. After the death of Mao and the beginnings of the reform period, however, they all came back. Yet, at least according to some spirit mediums, the spirits are now lost in a more figurative sense – even the gods came back as corrupt and untrustworthy beings so that the cosmic order is just as chaotic, immoral and untrustworthy as the human order on earth. Only a few gods remain as worthy exceptions, and the most important is Mao himself.

In addition to these two times of different sorts of loss of gods, Ng is also interested in the way that mediumship makes visible a multiplication of time by letting voices of the past speak in the present. As she puts it:

The vertigo of history, including the encounter of thought across times and spaces, is abbreviated and transfigured through the borrowed bodies of the mediums. Anticipations of end time and cosmological realignment reach forward and backward, resounding the very disjunctures of time collected across China’s long twentieth century and beyond, carving out a portion of intensified time that attempts to register the very meaning of the “now,” between catastrophe and eternity. (p. 144)

Here, she is drawing especially on Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (Routledge, 1994), where he discusses how Marx can haunt after the fall of socialism. In her