On 16 June 2019, Hong Kong caught the world’s attention when reportedly two million people took to the streets to force, among others, the Chief Executive to officially shelf the extradition bill that, as widely believed by Hong Kong people, would jeopardize the ‘one country, two systems’ framework of the Special Administrative Region. Four days before the history-making rally, the government tried pushing through the immensely controversial bill despite heated opposition. Had it not been for the lockdown of the Legislative Council building due to crowds of angry protestors who were brutally dispersed by countless rounds of tear gas and rubber bullets, the bill would have been passed, and the title of this essay might have arguably become Hong Kong Studies in the past tense.

A perfect storm

According to Albert Chen, Cheng Chan Lan Yau Professor in Constitutional Law at the University of Hong Kong, the attempt to push through the extradition bill that involves a rendition arrangement between Hong Kong and Mainland China, “generated a ‘perfect storm’ in Hong Kong that was completely unnecessary and avoidable.” While I agree that this ‘perfect storm’ was avoidable, I would also argue that more controversies will evolve as Hong Kong has been hopelessly bound by the unresolvable confluence of neoliberal capitalism and state capitalism in the age of China. The conflicts as well as collusion between two capitals have generated a persistent storm in the Special Administrative Region. The recent US-China trade dispute, which is not just about trade, may usher in a new era of ‘one world two systems’ global order, and Hong Kong, an inseparable part of China and its window to the world, would be trapped in the eye of this storm. That said, this essay focuses on Hong Kong Studies rather than the extradition saga – and how that will end is still anyone’s guess.

Hong Kong’s increasingly marginalized, minor position, especially after the Umbrella Movement and the subsequent (skepticism of Carrie Lam as the new Chief Executive in 2017, has become a predicament as well as condition for the Special Administrative Region. Given that the author has been writing about Hong Kong since he inaugurated the new Hong Kong administration on the final day of his three-day visit to the region, in December 2016, it is acutely felt, a proactive consideration of the future development of Hong Kong Studies within emerging Mainland-HK relations,’ is pertinent to the future development of Hong Kong Studies, trapped in the ‘perfect storm’ shadows. Just take the above-mentioned annual meetings to come”.10 In the Hong Kong context, Hong Kong Studies will continue to shed illuminating light on politically engaged analyses of the changes and social challenges that confront the world today, with far-reaching theoretical implications for related areas. Grossberg believed that culture can be an effective mediator, universal and specific at once, and the new generation of scholars must foster an “open-minded and progressive vanguard of intellectual and political movements to come.”11 In the Hong Kong context, progressive vanguards cannot but take a step further to consider the (in)possibility of Hong Kong Studies in relation to the ‘one world two systems’ global order. It is in this sense that the future continuity of Hong Kong has to be understood.

Imagining a future

As perceptively noted by Arif Dirlik in ‘The Rise of China and the End of the World as We Know It’, the PRC is a rising power in search of global order, and Hong Kong, an inseparable part of China and its window to the world, would be a key question to ask as Beijing has become a global power of global importance. It is in this sense that Hong Kong must rethink its future in the new global order.

Notes


2. ‘Xiao draws red line for handling Hong Kong issues’, Xinhua News, 1 July 2017, https://english.xinhua.net.cn/2017-07/01/c_136434254.htm

3. Ibid. Gr and ‘Extradition bill in Hong Kong: legal and political considerations’, The University of Hong Kong, 2019; https://tinyurl.com/apsichen


7. Ibid.


Postscript

Since the writing of this essay in early July 2019, two crucial and unforeseen events have happened in Hong Kong during the summer of protests. At certain junctures people were deeply worried that the uniqueness of the Special Administrative Region would vanish. Despite Carrie Lam’s formal withdrawal of the extradition bill on 9 September 2019, there is still no obvious end in sight. Given the highly volatile situation, the difficulty faced by critics is that their works will almost always be outdated before publication. Without a crystal ball, it is not possible to speculate how the worst chaos in Hong Kong’s history will end, and it is beyond the scope of this short essay to examine the civil unrest in detail. That said, I decided to keep the original version and just added this postscript, which is not intended to be a review of developments that have occurred since the essay was written, but rather a footnote to underscore the importance of Hong Kong as well as its vulnerable situation in the new global order.

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Hong Kong Studies in the future continuous tense