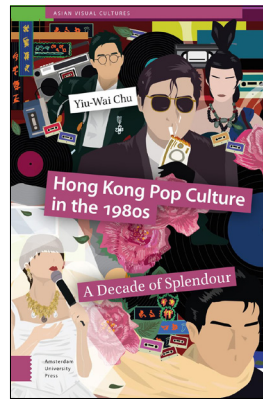


rule. In some way, this can be construed as a book about the danger faced by an authoritarian regime born of civil war in trying to rehabilitate some of its former enemies: some of the activists seized this opportunity to outdo the Party-state in this process, sometimes expressing a surprisingly outspoken dislike for the CCP. Paradoxically, though, Lin's focus on masculinity leads her to downplay the most explicitly political implications of her subject (which, however, she does address in a stimulating article published in *Memory Studies* in 2021). This could be deliberate: tackling such a question head-on may be unwise for a Chinese scholar in the current context. Still, one cannot help but regret that an obviously gifted researcher should publish a book often best read against the grain.

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Hong Kong Pop Culture in the 1980s: A Decade of Splendour.

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

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"We'll always have Hong Kong." With these words, borrowed from Bono Lee (2008), himself paraphrasing Humphrey Bogart's famous line in *Casablanca*, Yiu-Wai Chu begins and ends his new study of Hong Kong popular culture a few years after his history of Cantopop (2017), this time focusing on the "golden decade" of the 1980s. With *Hong Kong Pop Culture in the 1980s: A Decade of Splendour*, Inaugural Professor and Director of Hong Kong Studies Programme at The University of Hong Kong Yiu-Wai Chu continues his systematic analysis of the rise and fall of Hong Kong pop culture. Chu's new book can be read as a nostalgic testament to the 1980s pop culture he experienced as a child – "culturally speaking, the 1980s was the Hong Kong I will always have" (p. 273). However, Chu wisely cautions against unilaterally declaring the "death of Hong Kong," a pronouncement made numerous times since the 1997 handover. Refuting Richard Hughes' now-classic truism "borrowed time, borrowed place" (1968), conveniently used to define Hong Kong's particular geopolitical position, Chu quotes renowned writer Kai-cheung Dung to remind us that "we belong to the space-time that is ours. Nobody lends it to us and we don't borrow it from anybody" (p. 12). Hong Kong is thus never dead to its own people.

Since the 1970s, Hong Kong identity has been closely linked to the production and consumption of popular culture in Cantonese, with the 1980s representing its apex, when "Hong Kong people came to take pride in their cultural identities" (p. 28). This decisive decade, positioned between the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984, which set the conditions for the transfer of Hong Kong to Chinese control in 1997, and the repression of the Tiananmen movement in 1989, forms the core of Chu's book. It is both a personal love letter to Hong Kong popular culture and a deep dive into the formation of a unique Hong Kong identity in the 1980s, which is essential for understanding contemporary Hong Kong. Voluntarily conflating "pop" and "popular" culture, Chu divides his book into six chapters, each focusing on a specific medium

or cultural product: TV, cinema, music, fashion, disco-clubs, and magazines. Chu assumes the subjectivity of his analysis: drawing on Leo Ou-fan Lee (2008) and Rey Chow's (2014) personal accounts of Hong Kong, Chu shares his "personal belonging," and "[tells] the story of Hong Kong from [his] own perspective – as an inveterate fan of Hong Kong pop culture since the 1970s" (p. 13).

Unexpectedly, the most innovative part is the prologue, aptly titled "Horse Racing and Dancing as Usual." Chu derives this title from Deng Xiaoping's speech to the members of the Hong Kong Basic Law Drafting Committee in 1987, where he promised that "horse-racing and dancing will continue, and capitalist lifestyle will remain unchanged" (p. 19) in Hong Kong, even after the handover. This promise was reiterated in 2020 by Xia Baolong, now director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, when explaining the National Security Law to the Hong Kong delegates at the National People's Congress: "Horses will run even faster, and dancing will be even more spectacular" (p. 20). Horse-racing and dancing, two symbols of "capitalism consumerism but also cosmopolitan hybridity" (p. 20), were indeed significant cultural activities in the 1980s. Horse-racing, "a typical British colonial sport" (p. 20), transcended class and ethnicity, with the rivalry between legendary jockeys Derek Tai-chi Cheng and George Moore captivating Hong Kong. Dancing was equally important: in 1984, a week before the signing of the Joint Declaration, Club Volvo opened its doors with the presence of the deputy director of Xinhua News Agency Li Chunwen, the then de facto representative of China in Hong Kong, signalling "Beijing's commitment to keeping the lifestyle of Hong Kong beyond 1997" (p. 25).

Chu's review of popular cultural productions specifically highlights the synergy between different media platforms in the 1980s – the symbiotic relationship between TV, cinema, and music being the focus of the first three chapters. The TV networks TVB and RTV were star-making centres, where Leslie Cheung, Andy Lau, and Chow Yun-fat launched their careers. Hong Kong cinema also peaked at the same time, with the rise of young filmmakers such as Tsui Hark, Alex Cheung, and Ann Hui experimenting with new genres and addressing pressing social issues. TV shows and movies also served as vehicles for Cantopop songs, which became an immensely profitable industry. In each chapter, Chu uses the example of the 1980s Cantopop megastar trio – Leslie Cheung, Anita Mui, and Danny Chan – to explain the cross-media synergy of Hong Kong pop culture. The trio was also at the forefront of the fashion industry, collaborating with both Hong Kong and foreign designers for their concerts and album covers. The fashion industry, which is the subject of Chapter Four, indeed marked Hong Kong popular culture in the 1980s, with the establishment of Joyce Boutique by fashion retailer Joyce Ma, and the youth brand Esprit brought to Hong Kong by Michael Ying.

Disco nightclubs – where Cantopop superstars Danny Chan and Anita Mui often held mini-concerts in the 1980s – constitute the focus of Chapter Five. Chu specifically tells the story of the club Disco Disco, which was opened in Lan Kwai Fong (at the time a deserted alley) by Gordon Huthart, the openly gay son of the director of the department store Lane Crawford, in order to provide Hong Kong youth with a place to dance, regardless of race or sexual preference. "As a consumer space, Disco Disco was the

cosmopolitan alternative to colonial exclusivity; as a sexualized space, Disco Disco was set up to challenge the heterosexual hegemony of the colony" (p. 187). Its success paved the way for other clubs, such as Canton Disco in Kowloon, which became "the coolest place on the planet" (p. 194) in the mid-1980s. Finally, the book's last chapter examines Hong Kong famous *City Magazine* (Haowai 號外) founded by, among others, Chan Koonchung – known in the Anglophone world for his dystopian novel *The Fat Years*, a fact unfortunately not mentioned by Chu. Following Allen Chun's seminal analysis of the same magazine, Chu focuses on its trend-setting role. The epilogue reads as a final chapter, this time focused on soccer, and more specifically on the Seiko Sports Association, Chu's favourite team, which participated in internationalising Hong Kong's soccer in the 1980s.

Yiu-wai Chu's latest book is certainly his most personal, but also the most informative for anyone interested in Hong Kong pop culture in the 1980s and beyond. His personal preferences, however, sometimes obscure other significant cultural phenomena. While Leslie Cheung, Anita Mui, and Danny Chan are systematically mentioned, the legendary rock band Beyond and the experimental Cantopop duo Tat Ming Pair (the subject of another excellent recent book by Yiu Fai Chow, Jeroen de Kloet, and Leonie Schmidt, 2024) are relegated to a single paragraph. Chu's encyclopaedic knowledge is invaluable, but it sometimes lacks contextualisation, especially for readers unfamiliar with Hong Kong's cultural history. Although the 1980s are thoroughly analysed, the final year of the decade and its impact on Hong Kong's cultural production are never mentioned. The absence of the 1989 Tiananmen movement is particularly striking, given that almost all the stars mentioned by Chu supported the students during a historic concert held in Victoria Park in May 1989. Despite these shortcomings, *Hong Kong Pop Culture in the 1980s* is a crucial work for understanding the formation of collective identity in Hong Kong but also for comprehending Chinese popular culture, which remains deeply indebted to Hong Kong's 1980s pop culture.

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