

**CHIU, Stephen W. K., and
Kaxton Y. K. SIU. 2022.**

***Hong Kong Society:
High-definition Stories
beyond the Spectacle of
East-meets-West.***

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While Hong Kong has always garnered international attention, especially in recent years when protests seemingly paralysed the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), Stephen W. K. Chiu and Kaxton Y. K. Siu assert that there are areas of the city's history still left unexplored, as the usual "standard-definition" analyses include only "taken-for-granted stories, myths and representations of" the former British colony (p. x). Employing a "high-definition" method of scholarly examination, one whereby the authors analyse ten "popular visual imager[ies] of Hong Kong" in a "high degree of detail," thus challenging the conventional narratives of the city by uncovering previously ignored historical facts, the monograph under review examines the "multiple layers of experiences from [all] walks of life of Hong Kong people," how "global transformation[s]" impacted local lives, and the city's "significance in the global system" (p. ix-x).

Chapter One casts a critical eye over Hong Kong's birth and argues that "colonial modernisation," which privileged economic growth over democratic development, helped lay the foundation of Hong Kong's rise as a global city (p. 29). Chapter Two deepens readers' understanding of Hong Kong's economic rise by highlighting how local merchants helped establish the city's trade relations with jurisdictions in Southeast Asia, and cemented the then-British colony's economic ties with the United States and other western countries during the Cold War. Chapter Three pierces Hong Kong's cosmopolitan facade as a haven for migrants by noting that only those capable of economic contributions were welcomed with open arms. Chapter Four challenges the stereotype depicting Hong Kong

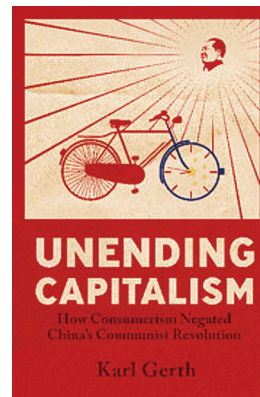
Chinese as politically apathetic by delineating the development of identity politics that had dominated the city since the postwar period. Chapter Five reveals that Hong Kong's industrial rise was the by-product of constant government interventions. Chapter Six concentrates on the decline of the local movie industry and argues that the decisions of local movie producers to seek new opportunities through collaboration with mainland companies gradually led to the decline of Hong Kong cinema. In Chapter Seven, Chiu and Siu conclude that the city had never been a land of opportunity, as the local economic and academic systems privileged men and women from relatively affluent backgrounds, and it was difficult for those from the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum to move up in the class ladder. Chapter Eight parts ways with popular interpretations attributing lack of housing to the shortage of land and asserts that the city's persistent housing crisis was due to the absence of a cohesive and decisive governmental strategy from the 1960s onward. Chapter Nine states the city's perpetually low crime rate was not due to the efficiency of its police force, but could instead be attributed to the fact that private security forces had embedded themselves in malls all over Hong Kong. Chapter Ten shows that the city's civil society had been less robust than expected due to a partially democratic system that prevented dissidents from articulating their demands through institutional channels, meaning that protests on the streets became the sole means by which residents could vent their frustrations.

A focus of the authors' scrutiny of Hong Kong is the citywide protests that periodically erupted and created a lingering sense of mistrust between the local population and its rulers. The book is strengthened by analyses of local responses to the 1989 tragedy in Beijing, the 2003 mass protest against the attempt to implement Article 23 of the Basic Law deemed to be damaging to local political rights, the Umbrella Movement in 2014 to support universal suffrage, and the political crisis triggered by the extradition law proposed by Chief Executive Carrie Lam in 2019, especially since the authors argue that a determination to uphold the interests of the city when it was under threat and participation in massive protest marches were two vital elements in the formation of a Hong Kong identity, and these factors were highly present in popular mobilisations before and after 1997 (p. 110, p. 123-4, p. 343-60). It was a determination to protect their way of life, the core values of which included an aspiration towards democratic governance, that propelled the protestors, especially those who had joined the anti-extradition law protests, to participate in popular movements (p. 365). The fact that even Beijing claimed that it was solely economic discontent that drove so many Hong Kong Chinese to the street demonstrates that there existed stereotypical (or standard-definition) conceptions of the city and its inhabitants, such as the HKSAR being populated by citizens whose sole interest in life was moneymaking. These are stereotypes that the authors have successfully overturned using their high-definition method of inquiry (p. 9-10, p. 364).

Of course, Beijing was not wrong to claim that there existed serious socioeconomic problems in Hong Kong, something that Chiu and Siu acknowledge in several chapters of their monograph, thus demonstrating that the city, in spite of its outward vibrancy, is beset by a variety of social, economic, and political ailments that require acknowledgment and attention. Hong Kong therefore merits scholarly investigation, and the authors should be praised because

rather than presenting a series of instant snapshots of the city, an approach that would have rendered this book quickly out of date due to the escalating pace of change that has engulfed the HKSAR, their work investigates how the city's problems and tribulations first arose by employing a historical approach. This shows that their high-definition method encompasses an in-depth understanding of Hong Kong's highly complicated past that would prevent analysts from misdiagnosing the root causes of the HKSAR's ongoing afflictions. It is nevertheless worth noting that the reference sections of this monograph include mostly works by other Hong Kong scholars. While the authors ably synthesise the works of leading Hong Kong scholars, a criticism could be made that there is an absence of primary research in their monograph.

In the postscript, the authors mention that they are witnessing a revival of Hong Kong studies, an outcome to which they have tried their best to contribute by successfully demonstrating that Hong Kong is indeed deserving of serious academic scrutiny. Regardless of whether Hong Kong studies is experiencing a renaissance, Chiu and Siu have produced a thought-provoking work on one of the most important cities in China. China specialists should thank them for their willingness to publish a monograph that could be seen as controversial in these highly unusual times.



GERTH, Karl. 2020.
***Unending Capitalism:
How Consumerism Negated
China's Communist
Revolution.***

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The third book in what is a very intriguing trilogy exploring consumerism in China over the decades, Karl Gerth's *Unending Capitalism: How Consumerism Negated China's Communist Revolution* provides a look at the unique way in which consumerism thrived amidst and despite China's socialism goals. The trilogy explores a previously overlooked topic: the origin and growth of consumerism in China. When the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in 1949, it aimed to end capitalism. Gerth notes, however, that three decades later, capitalism seems to have survived and even trumped communism as the driving force behind China's economy. The book offers a new look at the apparent failure of communism in China by examining the factors that fuelled consumerism in China. Its author emphasises "the mass production of consumer products, the proliferation of a discourse about these products in popular media, and the use of such products to create and communicate identities" (p. 1) as the key factors responsible for the flourishing of consumerism in China, nevertheless clarifying that these factors were in existence in the pre-revolution period and that CCP's policies led to their expansion.

The CCP's professed intention was to build socialism by eliminating elements of capitalism, including its consumerist expressions. However, consumerism became a structural consequence of the CCP's social and economic policies (p. 2) that prioritised economic growth and technological advancement in order to match rival nations. For example, to accumulate national capital, it was necessary to restrict the inflow of imports and, consequently, the outflow of capital. The CCP used coercive tactics to influence the consumption of domestically produced products. Despite an awareness that these policy outcomes posed a threat to the CCP's communist goals, they were necessary for the economic growth of the People's Republic. The Party mobilised citizens to purchase local products, promoting consumerism to build domestic capital. The Party's industrialisation goals were prioritised over the long-term goals of becoming a communist state.