

University of Kentucky

UKnowledge

Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies Faculty
Publications

Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies

1-2021

[Review of] *Hong Kong in Revolt: The Protest Movement and the Future of China*, by Au Loong-Yu. London: Pluto Press, 2020. vii+198 pp. US\$22.95 (paper).

Shui-yin Sharon Yam
University of Kentucky, s.yam@uky.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/wrd_facpub



Part of the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

[Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.](#)

Repository Citation

Yam, Shui-yin Sharon, "[Review of] *Hong Kong in Revolt: The Protest Movement and the Future of China*, by Au Loong-Yu. London: Pluto Press, 2020. vii+198 pp. US\$22.95 (paper)." (2021). *Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies Faculty Publications*. 11.

https://uknowledge.uky.edu/wrd_facpub/11

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.

[Review of] *Hong Kong in Revolt: The Protest Movement and the Future of China*, by Au Loong-Yu. London: Pluto Press, 2020. vii+198 pp. US\$22.95 (paper).

Digital Object Identifier (DOI)

<https://doi.org/10.1086/711519>

Notes/Citation Information

Published in *The China Journal*, v. 85.

The copyright holder has granted the permission for posting the book review here.

Hong Kong in Revolt: The Protest Movement and the Future of China, by Au Loong-Yu. London: Pluto Press, 2020. vii+198 pp. US\$22.95 (paper).

Au Loong-Yu's book examines the 2019 Anti-Extradition Movement in Hong Kong. Compared to recent books such as Antony Dapiran's *City on Fire: The Fight for Hong Kong* and Jeffrey Wasserstrom's *Vigil: Hong Kong on the Brink*, Au assumes greater background knowledge among his readers. He offers in-depth analysis of the different actors within and outside the movement, contextualizing their respective ideologies and relationships with one another. Au also situates the Hong Kong protest amidst the geopolitical tension between China and the United States. By doing so, he illuminates how Hongkongers' protest tactics and actions are differently interpreted abroad in a transnational context.

The book is organized into five main chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the 2019 protests, delineating the movement in four different stages from February to December. Au is careful in this chapter to delineate the internal ideological differences among protesters. In particular, he extensively analyzes the people who identified as localists and tended to espouse a xenophobic, anti-Chinese immigrant discourse even prior to the 2019 protests.

Au's analysis of localism continues in chapter 2, "Actors." In this chapter, he categorizes and examines the diverse participants of the movement, which include youths born after 1997, the year Hong Kong was handed over to Chinese sovereignty; the "braves" who clashed on the front line with anti-riot police; union organizers; pan-democrats; localists; mainland Chinese immigrants and students; dissident civil servants; women and ethnic minorities. The chapter highlights the internal complexities and diversity of the movement. For instance, when critiquing the xenophobia and other right-wing tendencies among localists led by Horace

Chin Wan, Au is careful in pointing out that not all who identify as localists subscribe to the same ideology. By delineating right-wing xenophobic protesters from the rest of the decentralized movement, Au demonstrates that this group is not representative of Hong Kong protesters.

Chapter 3 captures the key protest events in 2019. These include the July 1 Legislative Council occupation, the July 21 Yuen Long mob attack against people who support the protests, the August 5 general strike, and the sieges of two university campuses.

In Chapter 4, Au examines the different political visions and ideologies Hong Kong protesters held. He acknowledges the local contexts, traces how symbols were repurposed, and examines how messages could be interpreted in ways that went against the protesters' intents and values. He turns to examples such as the common use of Pepe the Frog in Hong Kong protests, explaining that in Hong Kong the image does not carry the same alt-right connotations as it does in the United States. Au acknowledges that Hongkongers do not always have the rhetorical knowledge to realize the connotations of their protest performances, specifically how certain symbols—like the American flag—could alienate potential leftist allies abroad.

Since capturing the limelight of international news, the Hong Kong movement has been mobilized by political actors outside of Hong Kong to serve their own purposes. For instance, conservative American lawmakers and politicians who vehemently oppose Black Lives Matter protests in the United States commonly voiced their support for Hong Kong protesters in order to undermine the Chinese government. On the other hand, authoritarian regime apologists have vilified the movement by magnifying the role in it of the right-wing localists. Au's analysis in chapter 4 takes these geopolitical tensions into account but ultimately focuses on the experiences and perspectives of local Hong Kong protesters. This angle highlights the protesters' agency, rather than allowing more powerful actors abroad to appropriate and determine the meaning of the movement.

In chapter 4, Au also illustrates the need for Hong Kong activists to recognize existing social inequalities in their organizing strategies. As a seasoned labor organizer, his analysis is often class driven. For example, focusing on existing economic inequities in Hong Kong, Au critiques the limitations of certain protest tactics, such as blocking public transportation to force people to go on strike. To Au, a tactic like this can backfire because it does not consider that many Hong Kong people cannot afford to skip work, and they were likely to resent protesters who prevent them from getting to work. Au also critiques how protest maxims that call for solidarity can foreclose opportunities for deliberation from within the movement.

The final chapter, "The Dragon, the Goose, and the Coronavirus," is the broadest in scope. Au situates the current crisis in Hong Kong in relation to its colonial history and the geopolitics between the United States and China. Au illuminates

that Hong Kong's liminal status has prompted many young Hongkongers to sympathize with the xenophobic localist ideology, as it offers a concrete identity. Throughout the book and particularly in this chapter, Au illustrates the ideological contradictions within the Hong Kong movement, but he also highlights the importance of transnational solidarity and international support for the movement, despite the flaws and limitations of such support.

Au advocates for a Hong Kong identity and self-determination rather than independence from China. Specifically, he argues that fighting Chinese state nationalism with a different form of nationalism is a mistake. To Au, self-determination serves a strategic value if it can simultaneously promote connections with mainland Chinese people and encourage them to also pursue and exercise political agency. After examining the escalating tension between Beijing and Washington, the book ends by calling on the international left to stand in solidarity with the Hong Kong movement. In particular, Au emphasizes that Washington's rhetorical support of the movement in no way diminishes Hongkongers' rightful concerns against an authoritarian regime.

Hong Kong in Revolt offers a nuanced and deeply contextualized analysis of the 2019 Hong Kong protests. The book is particularly relevant to researchers who study identity formation, grassroots movements, and nationalism. Focusing on the protest movement and its participants on their own terms, Au's book is a refreshing addition and alternative to the discourse that subsumes or appropriates the Hong Kong movement while centering on Sino-US tensions.

Shui-yin Sharon Yam
University of Kentucky
