

Book Review

Sonny Shiu-Hing Lo. *The New Politics of Beijing-Hong Kong Relations: Ideological Conflicts and Factionalism*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2024, 304 pages. HK\$700. ISBN: 978-988-8805-72-3.

In this cutting-edge and exceptional book on Beijing-Hong Kong relations, Sonny Lo provides a comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of Beijing-Hong Kong relations, particularly in the post-national security law era. Moreover, this book understands the alterations in Hong Kong's political landscape over the last two decades from both perspectives of Beijing and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) governments, as well as Hong Kong democrats and localists.

This book comprises five succinct chapters, including Introduction and Conclusion. Lo contends in the introduction that ideological clashes have been pivotal to Beijing-Hong Kong relations since the city reverted from British to Chinese rule in 1997. The ideological clashes have escalated significantly since 2003 (p. 1). An instance that exemplifies the ideological clashes is the anti-extradition bill movement that occurred in 2019. Following this incident, the national security law was promulgated and enacted by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on 30 June 2020. This legislation represents a watershed in Hong Kong's politics and a hallmark of establishing a political system in HKSAR based on a "patron-client and paternalistic" approach (p. 2). Moreover, factional struggles between the HKSAR government and pro-Beijing forces, as well as between radical democrats and Beijing's authorities, have led to a greater level of intervention from the central government in HKSAR's political development (p. 5). The following chapter draws on in-depth studies of Chinese politics and its implications from policy towards HKSAR.

The enactment and implementation of the Hong Kong national security law signify the increasing involvement of the central government in HKSAR's political development and matters. Thus, it is imperative to comprehend the dynamic of the new politics of Beijing-Hong Kong relations. Lo adopts the approach of analysing the characteristics of Chinese politics and subsequently exploring how these characteristics influence Beijing-Hong Kong relations (Chapter 1). The need for

conformity characterises Chinese political culture. It reflects a “profound fear of *luan*, or disorder,” and is one of the most significant motives of the central government’s approach towards HKSAR. From Beijing’s perspective, conformity is the key to maintaining stability and prosperity, and nonconformity needs to be rectified (p. 18). Beijing’s handling of the anti-extradition bill movement and enacting and implementing the national security law demonstrates its perception of political-driven social movements as threats to national security and colour revolution. Lo criticises some Hong Kong protest activists who turn a blind eye to Beijing’s fear of the Soviet-style collapse and colour revolution are “unwise” and “unfortunate” (p. 23). Consequently, Beijing tightened its grip towards HKSAR to rectify the nonconformity and address the threat to national security. In addition, this book highlights that China, under President Xi, is internally authoritarian but externally more liberal and multilateral (p. 28). Beijing reckons that implementing the national security law is an effective approach to defeating the political enemies in HKSAR who have been controlled by external forces and continue to see the city as a gateway to expand its ties with the globe multilaterally.

Beijing-Hong Kong relations are characterised by the intertwining of ideologies and factionalism (Chapter 2). Before 2012, localism in the city was accompanied by widespread concerns and apprehension regarding the potential erosion of the distinctive lifestyle and civil liberties enjoyed by Hong Kong people due to “mainlandisation” (p. 98). The concerns and apprehension transformed into anti-mainland sentiments, which were evident in the interaction between mainlanders and Hong Kong people. After 2012, the political dynamics between Beijing and HKSAR were defined by the clashes between two dominant ideologies: nationalism, which leaned towards the mainland and adhered to the central authority’s agenda, and localism, which favoured Hong Kong’s distinct identity characterised by resisting “mainlandisation” (p. 99). Moreover, there are different factions in both pro-Beijing nationalism, such as conservative and liberal nationalists and localism, such as nationalistic localists, liberal localists, Marxist localists, confrontational localists, and separatist localists. This factional struggle in the HKSAR was fiercely contested among the Hong Kong people with different perspectives on Beijing’s influence across various aspects.

The connotation of Beijing’s “comprehensive jurisdiction” for HKSAR becomes increasingly evident with the enactment and implementation

of the Hong Kong national security law (Chapter 3). The concept of “comprehensive jurisdiction” refers to the central government being the source that grants HKSAR a high degree of autonomy. Beijing believes that it not only fosters socio-political stability and economic prosperity but also recognises the distinctiveness of the “one country, two systems” (p. 189). To realise the “comprehensive jurisdiction” over HKSAR, the central government is resolute in cultivating and strengthening patriotic sentiments in HKSAR by reforming the local electoral system. In addition, HKSAR can be seen as a battleground where Chinese political civilisation clashes with Western civilisation, as well as Chinese and Western political cultures. These clashes appear in the ongoing debate between China and the West regarding the development of Hong Kong since mid-2020. The Sinic civilisation is deeply ingrained in China, and its leaders and officials firmly believe that the central state has granted the rights of Hong Kong people. This belief aligns with the concept of “Chinese democracy”, which places great significance on “the values of paternalism, collectivism, and state dominance” (p. 194). In contrast, the West reckons that the central government’s approaches towards HKSAR since 2019 have weakened the “one country, two systems” and restricted the city’s autonomy and social freedom (p. 195). In the conclusion, Lo asserts that there have been tensions in various aspects between Hong Kong people and the central authority since the reversion of Hong Kong. The tensions manifested through the form of socio-political movements and struggles, culminating in the victory of “one country” in the post-national security law era (p. 240).

Overall, the book provides a comprehensive and insightful analysis of Beijing-Hong Kong relations in the post-national security law era. It offers a critical examination of the subject matter, presenting a thorough understanding of the topic. In addition, Lo’s articulate writing style enhances the clarity and distinctiveness of the book. This book is undeniably valuable for regular readers who are interested in Hong Kong’s politics and status quo. It is also appropriate for scholars and students specialising in Hong Kong studies and Chinese politics.

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