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Introduction: Gender and Change in Hong Kong

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The Research Question

This book examines gender and change in Hong Kong from the 1980s to the 1990s, which was a critical historical juncture of significant economic, political, and social changes brought about by both exogenous and endogenous factors. Specifically, it examines, through various perspectives, the interaction of three important forces, namely globalization, postcolonialism, and Chinese patriarchy, and their relationship with women's changing identities and agencies. Underlying these changes is the historical context of colonial modernity shaped by the integration of the colonial state,¹ the capitalist economy, and Hong Kong society. At the heart of the study is the presupposition that these processes were infused with women's agencies and oppression, and provided at once obstacles and opportunities for women's liberation.

The chapters in this book attempt to shed light on the issues by examining legal changes, political participation, the situation of working-class and professional women, sexuality, religion, and international migration. This introductory chapter will discuss the key historical contexts and concepts, and give an overview of the themes of the various chapters.

The Colonial State, the Capitalist Economy, and the Chinese Society: Colonial Modernity and Its Gender Consequences

The Colonial State

Recent researchers (Ngo 1999a) have refuted the old assumption that the colonial state in Hong Kong merely practised noninterventionism in social and economic affairs.² Instead, what they found was a complex situation of selective intervention and nonintervention by the colonial state, often according to the strategic need to maintain effective domination. This strategic and selective intervention/nonintervention in social affairs constituted state policies that could have gender consequences. In this sense, the colonial

state can be regarded as patriarchal insofar as it has perpetuated women's subordination through its public policies, actions, and inactions. In the first place, the governing strategy of elite co-optation and its repercussions have resulted in the prolonged maintenance of patriarchal social institutions in the name of respecting the social customs and practices of Chinese society. Their preservation was often the outcome of negotiation with Chinese male business and rural elites.³ This is evident in the practice of the *mui tsai* (girl slave) system until the 1950s (Miners 1995a; Sinn 1994), the acceptance of polygamy until 1971, and the persistence of unequal inheritance rights in the New Territories until 1994 (Lee 2000). Social forces co-opted by the state for colonial domination have contributed to women's subordination. As Jones (1994) comments on the outcome of elite co-optation,

In this way, Chinese culture ... became a fixed, static, and monolithic set of values emphasizing an unchanging hierarchical and patriarchal order. This imperial assimilation of Chinese culture has had long-term effects, especially for women ... In courts of law, this [imperial] interpretation was supplied by "China experts," usually missionaries ... Their view of Chinese women was filtered through their own patriarchal world-view, aided and abetted by their male informants from the Chinese community, typically elite Chinese men. Women then were doubly colonized, first by their colonial masters and secondly by male interpretations of their role in society. (118-19)

Elite co-optation also means the lack of women's voice and the persistence of male bias in the policy-making process. In the course of colonial rule, there was hardly any proactive policy on the government's part to improve women's status. Tones of naivety abounded in official responses to the demand of women's groups: "I am not aware of any provisions of our law which discriminate against women. This is not to say there may not be some ... but if you are not aware of them, it may be that they are not causing special problems" (*Women's Centre News* 1986, cited in Lui 1994).

More important, the broader policy approaches and developmental strategies of the colonial state have major gender consequences. In the course of postwar industrialization up to the 1970s and the economic restructuring in the 1980s, the colonial state persisted in an economic and budgetary policy of a low tax rate, low public expenditure, and a balanced budget as a strategy to promote its economic competitiveness. In the 1970s, under the governorship of Murray McLehose, a residual welfare state was built up through a modest development in social programs in the areas of public health, education, social welfare, and housing (Jones 1990, ch. 7). Nevertheless, welfare has not been officially recognized as a social right. Indeed, social policy is used as complementary measures for promoting economic

development rather than human development, often with conflicting gender consequences. The state has shown a systematic lack of gender sensitivity if not negligence about women's interests in policy issues such as domestic violence, lone mothers, social welfare, housing, child care, and so on (Kwok et al. 1997). The family ideology has been heavily promoted in social services, where the primary responsibility for the provision of care and welfare is assigned to the family (and thus in actuality, to the women) (Jones 1990, 221-2; Kwok et al. 1997, 252-6). Without adequate labour protection, social security, and welfare, familialism became a practical strategy of survival for individuals who were left to fend for their own livelihood. All these have helped perpetuate patriarchy. Educational opportunities, on the other hand, were gradually extended to the general population since the 1960s and 1970s, owing to the demand for more local talents to serve the expanding public and business sectors. This contributed to the rising educational attainment of women. In 1963, the second local university was established,⁴ while financial assistance to poor working-class students was given in the form of grants and loans. In 1971, six-year compulsory education (up to the primary school level) was instituted and, in 1978, it was expanded to nine years (up to the junior secondary school level). The expanded educational opportunities greatly contributed to the educational level of women, and since the early 1970s, the educational attainment gap between genders has been gradually closing. In 1971, 69.2 percent of females and 80.0 percent of males between the ages of twelve and sixteen were attending schools, while in 1981, the numbers were 83.4 percent (male) and 84.6 percent (female). The ratio of male to female local university students was around 2:1 in 1981; by 1988 it was 1.4:1 (Westwood, Mehraïn, and Cheung 1995). In the 1990s, tertiary education was further expanded and by 2000, women constituted 53.1 percent of the undergraduate students in local universities (Hong Kong 2001).⁵ In sum, the policy, actions, and inactions of the colonial state have resulted in conflicting social consequences for women's interests, and having produced both beneficiaries and victims, have helped construct women of different interests.

Capitalist Development

Capitalist development in Hong Kong is inseparable from its colonial history. Works on Hong Kong's economic history reveal how the course of capitalist development has been constituted by the power relations between the business elites and the colonial state. In this section, I will briefly highlight the gender consequences of capitalist development, with emphasis on how it has structured women's chances of employment and class mobility. Immediately after the British takeover, Hong Kong was made into an entrepôt where Western taipans, Chinese compradors, and merchants thrived (Carroll 1999; Faure 1997, 117-48; Tsai 1997, 17-35). Ngo (1999b) argues

that, contrary to the common understanding that industrialization did not begin until the 1950s, Chinese entrepreneurs had developed industries – and in substantial scale – by the 1930s. Evidence shows that by the 1920s to 1930s, commerce and industry had provided limited employment opportunities to women, who were already working as domestic servants, hawkers, factory workers, and manual labourers.⁶

From the 1960s to 1970s, a huge number of young women, the “working daughters” as they were called, entered the thriving manufacturing industries and supplied the bulwark of cheap factory labourers (Salaff 1981). The proletarianization of women was conditioned by the context within which industrialization took place. Recent studies by scholars, such as Chiu (1994) and Choi (1999), have shown that, contrary to the conventional view, industries successfully developed not because of the colonial government’s “good” policy of *laissez-faire* but despite the lack of appropriate state support. The state failed to provide support to industries because of Britain’s demand for colonies to maintain financial independence and its intent to prevent colonies from becoming its export competitors. The *laissez-faire* policy was also supported by the British-dominated commercial and banking elites who benefited from the policy and who enjoyed political power *vis-à-vis* the predominantly Chinese industrialists. Lacking in government support for industrial growth, industrial firms in Hong Kong were mostly small- and medium-sized. Their competitiveness hinged on their flexibility in the face of a highly fluctuating market. Young women provided an important source of cheap, unskilled, and flexible labourers that made possible the postwar industrial success.

Lee (1999) points out that the flexible manufacturing strategies reached their limits as other newly industrialized Asian countries also emerged in the 1970s and as local products began to lose their competitive edge in price, diversity, and quality. Lacking in government assistance, industries moved northward with China’s open door policy, leading to the demise of local industries and the rise of service industry as *entrepôt* trade was revived in the 1980s. The economic restructuring reduced the employment opportunities of working-class women.⁷ However, with the increase in the demand for professionals and managers in both the private and public sectors, employment opportunities for educated women were expanded.

Hong Kong Chinese Society: Individualism and Familialism

A comprehensive review of the changing nature of the Chinese society in Hong Kong is largely beyond the scope of this chapter. However, two particular characteristics, namely familialism and individualism, which have developed specifically in relation to the colonial state and the capitalist economy, are worth mentioning.

As discussed, the state's strategy of colonial domination has led to the perpetuation of patriarchal practices in many ways. Its approach to economic development contributed to the preservation of familialism, the nature of which is termed "utilitarian familism" by Lau (1982) and the "centripetal family" by Salaff (1981). Both agreed that the particular form of Hong Kong Chinese familialism was an adaptation to the colonial condition that forced individuals to rely on familial networks as their safety nets. According to Salaff, the modified centripetal family evolved from the traditional Chinese family to emerge in industrializing Hong Kong under conditions of low wages and the lack of social welfare. Family members had to pool their resources in order to survive and advance, and women were demanded to contribute to the economic well-being of their families. Postwar industrialization did not free women from subservience to the patriarchal family. Quite the contrary; being subjected to patriarchal authority was the context of their entrance into the public sphere of work, as many of them were compelled by the obligation to help earn a living for their families or pay the educational expenses of their male siblings. The patriarchal family was thus an important force that controlled women's labour and dictated their life chances. Salaff also observes that while women's economic contributions earned them more power and autonomy in terms of domestic decision making and marriage choice, they were "not accorded privileges and power commensurate with their contributions" (273).

Economic individualism is another outcome of capitalist development under colonialism (Wong and Lui 1994). There are two related aspects to this ideology. The first is the relationship between the individual and society. In Lau's analysis, utilitarian familism fosters among Hong Kong people an instrumental view toward society and the state: society and the state exist merely to advance the material interest of individuals and their family members. This results in a society characterized by a low social participation rate, a lack of civic-mindedness, and low class-consciousness. The second aspect concerns the sense of self. Studies found that Hong Kong people have experienced their "selves" as unencumbered; that is, their life chances are largely determined by their individual efforts, not by larger structural and institutional forces beyond their control. This is evident in the results of numerous surveys conducted in the 1970s and 1980s. People consistently regarded Hong Kong as a land of opportunities and believed that, with ability and effort, everyone had the chance to improve his or her social and economic status (Lau and Kuan 1988, ch. 2; Tsang 1994, 8). This version of individualism is acquisitive, egoistic, and not necessarily accompanied by a conception of individuals as rights-bearers (Lau and Kuan 1988, ch. 2). As will be shown in the rest of the book, it has a profound effect on one's conception of gender equality and citizenship.

Conclusion

The above discussion shows that the colonial state, the capitalist economy, and the Hong Kong Chinese society have interpenetrated and constituted each other. By “interpenetration” I mean that one supports the other’s operation, provides the context for the other’s development, or causes the transformation of the other’s institutional makeup. This integration has constituted the colonial modernity of Hong Kong. The essence of modernity for Hong Kong is the development of a market economy in the context of a colonial-bureaucratic state apparatus, which resulted in the marketization and rationalization of society. The marketization of society bred an individualistic social ethos that regarded the market as an apolitical and impersonal force, viewed individuals as agents of free choice, and endorsed the free competition among individuals as the basis of a just society. The rationalization of society was attained by a colonial-bureaucratic government that secured legitimacy through the successful administering of formal and impersonal laws, the limited provision of public services, and strategic intervention/nonintervention in society, short of the ability to articulate normative political discourse. In a way, colonial modernity has produced individualistic colonial subjects who have subjectively internalized the rationalistic market norms and lack a sense of political community. As Ong (1993) characterizes this colonial *homo economicus*,

Hong Kong Chinese experience political freedom as a market-place phenomenon, and perceive citizenship as the right to promote familial interests and economic gain with no sense of obligation to society at large. The pervasiveness of material values and the instrumental approach to all facets of social life are key components of the modern consciousness. The fashioning of self is thus almost totally expressed through the power of personal choice, risk-taking, and flexibility in the local marketplace and, increasingly, in the global economy. (754-5)

On the other hand, colonial modernity also provided the context for transformation and resistance. In what follows, such transformation and resistance will be explored through studying the interactive effects of globalization, postcolonialism, and patriarchy, especially since the 1980s. First, some brief discussions of the meanings of the key concepts are warranted.

Globalization, Postcolonialism, and Chinese Patriarchy: Development Since the 1980s

Globalization: Economic, Political, and Cultural Perspectives

Scholars have advanced various explanations of the origin and nature of globalization. Cultural theorists such as Featherstone (1992) emphasize the

globalization process as the extension of global cultural interrelatedness. The process produces both cultural homogeneity and disorder, and gives rise to transnational cultures (“third cultures”). Cultural globalization also involves a process of interaction of the global and the local. As Robertson (1992) states, it is “a form of institutionalization of the twofold process involving the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism” (102). Disjuncture is other major theme. Appadurai (1990) regards the global order as a disjunctive order involving different dimensions of global cultural flow, with outcomes that are historically contingent.⁸ To cultural theorists, globalization opens up possibilities for the redefinition of identities, which might expand the realm of self-definition but also cause the fragmentation and conflict of identities.

Political economic theorists see economic globalization largely as another stage of capitalist development, if not its logical continuation. Rupert (2000), for instance, conceptualizes economic globalization since the 1970s as the rise of a neoliberalism that seeks to resurrect “laissez-faire fundamentalism.” Rupert sees economic globalization as involving the strengthening of the global free trade regime through the institution of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF); the globalization of finance that has been exacerbated largely by information technology; and the emergence of multinational firms and the transnational organization of production (42-8). To critical political economists such as Rupert, economic globalization has brought about the deepening of class, racial, ethnic, and gender inequality at the local and international levels, and has given private capital more unaccountable public power.

Many also argue that some sort of political globalization is in the making. The development of international and regional networking of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), facilitated by information technology, has given rise to global civil society. By launching an international women’s movement, women’s groups were actually the pioneers of a global civil society, alongside organizations such as Amnesty International and Médecins Sans Frontières, whose actions have brought out the idea of a world citizen community with rights that transcend borders (Oliveira and Tandon 1994, ch. 1). The rise of a global civil society has also been elicited by economic globalization, with activists demanding “global democratization” (Rupert 2000). The transformative potential of economic globalization is implied in the analysis of Sassen (1998), who argues that global cities are strategic sites for “disempowered actors” (xxi), and “indeed contain conditions for the formation of a postcolonialist discourse” (xxx).

Studying the globalization process can thus enhance our understanding of gender and development in Hong Kong by relating the formation of new

gender identities with the various global processes and their interpenetration with local forces. Particularly worth studying is how the interaction between global and local forces have shaped women's agencies to bring about progressive transformation of the status quo.

Gender and Postcolonialism

Central to the debate on postcolonialism, understood here as the process of continuous resistance and reconstruction of the colonial discourse by the colonized (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995, 2), is the possibility of agency for postcolonial subjects. There is much emphasis on colonialism as a process of discursive formation involving the construction of hierarchies of subjects and knowledge. The authority of the colonizers was constructed on their racial superiority, from which they also construct the identity of the colonized others (or the "subaltern" in Spivak's term) (Prakash 1995). Colonial domination was thus legitimized through the production of discourses such as the "civilizing mission." Such discursive production, however, also contains the seeds for the emergence of oppositional and subversive discourses. The process of "re-inscription" or "writing back" is made possible through subverting and appropriating the text of the colonizers (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995; Bhabha, 1994). But the subaltern may also play a constitutive or complicit role in the production of colonial discourse and subjectivity. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995) state, in addressing the concern of Spivak (1988) regarding the possibility of a subaltern subject that can "know and speak itself," the oppositional discourse and subjectivity are bound to be hybridized, since the dominant discursive practices serve to "limit and define the possibility of opposition" (3).

The agency of Third World women is the particular concern of postcolonial feminism. Mohanty (1988) in particular points out that Western feminist writings have neglected the heterogeneity of the lives of Third World women, turning them into the objects of Western feminist discourse if not the Other of Western feminists. The central issues then are to avoid essentializing women, thereby placing them in a monolithic category, and to let Third World women represent themselves, with their own voices.

In Hong Kong, colonial power formally retreated at midnight of 1 July 1997, but a period of political transition began with the signing of the Joint Declaration between the Chinese and British governments in 1984. The process unleashed various forces, including women activists in search of a postcolonial identity. What kind of oppositional (gender) discourses have been socially produced through appropriating the dominant discourse, and under what circumstances were such discourses produced? In what ways have these discourses subverted or affirmed colonial power? In what sense are Hong Kong women postcolonial subjects? Can Hong Kong women be

legitimately called Third World women or, with Hong Kong's economic development, are First World women coexisting with Third World ones? If so, what are their relationships and how are we to characterize postcolonial women in Hong Kong? These issues are important for understanding the relationship between gender and postcolonialism in Hong Kong.

Chinese Patriarchy as Historically Evolving Institutions

Patriarchy has been an important but controversial concept in feminist literature. While there is certain agreement on the usefulness of the concept to stipulate the systematic and institutionalized domination of men over women, scholars reject any grand theory explaining the oppression and subordination of women across time and culture. Postmodernist feminists emphasize the difference in experience among women of different class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, while postcolonial feminists stress that the situations of Third World women (and thus their agencies) should be understood with reference to the concrete historical and cultural contexts of their patriarchal experiences. There is still less agreement on how patriarchy is related to other social institutions, such as the mode of production. While radical feminists see patriarchy as the primary source of women's subordination, some Marxist feminists either subsume patriarchy under class exploitation or stress the partnership of patriarchy with capitalism.

The starting point of this book is that patriarchy consists of a set of institutions and ideologies about unequal gender relations that should be understood in its concrete historical, cultural, and political contexts. Chinese patriarchy is thus a set of historically evolving institutions with local variations. Indeed, recent research reveals that the patriarchal control of women in China, even merely among the Han people, varies with class, ethnicity, locality, and historical period (Ko 1994; Sheridan and Salaff 1984). In the late nineteenth century, vast political, social, and cultural changes in China had already transformed the status and identities of many Chinese women,⁹ and a feminist discourse emerged in China. For instance, women started to gain more access to education and employment. They participated in social movements, revolutions, and even military operations. The feminist discourse that emerged, however, was confined mostly to the intelligentsia and elites (Honig and Hershatter 1988; Zheng 1999). Other research shows that much of the Confucian patriarchal family system remained intact at least up to the Second World War. For instance, from the account of Jaschok and Miers (1994), women were subjugated to the power of their fathers, husbands, and sons and had no independent status outside the family. Polygamy was common, and women could be married by their parents against their will, or bought and sold as slaves and prostitutes (Watson 1991). The lives of women were largely confined to maternal and reproductive roles, and

they had little social and economic independence outside the family. Nonetheless, the marginality of Hong Kong's position offered space for changes in the lives of women. From the beginning of its colonial history, Hong Kong was the place of confluence of migrants from China, colonial officials, foreign merchants, and missionaries (Jones 1990; Smith 1995). Early missionary activities provided avenues for women to obtain education and enter the public sphere. Some women resorted to affiliation with Western men as a means of gaining independence (Smith 1995).¹⁰ Others adopted various forms of resistance, such as sworn spinsterhood or becoming migrant workers to escape submission and servitude (Jaschok and Miers 1994).

Women's status within the family has changed substantially in the past decades. The rise of the nuclear family, the decrease in the birth rate, and the higher age of first marriage, all persistent trends since the 1970s, are demographic signs that the traditional patriarchal family has lost its integrity. Patriarchal institutions do, however, remain intact in various spheres (Ng 1994). As the results of a recent major territory-wide survey on gender equality show, substantial gender inequality still exists in the household division of labour, employment, and community and political participation (Equal Opportunities Commission 1997). Ching Kwan Lee's (1998) comparative ethnographic studies of factory women in Hong Kong and Shenzhen testify to the importance of familialism in shaping the identity of Hong Kong women in the 1990s, who "define their womanhood and femininity with reference to familial, kinship, and localistic relations, obligations, and values. Their gender identities and gender interests are rooted more in social networks, mutually dependent statuses, and obligations connected to others, rather than in atomistic, presocial, autonomous, sexual selves" (35).

While a comprehensive review of patriarchal institutions in the Hong Kong Chinese society is beyond the scope of this book, we hope to understand through the various case studies presented here how Chinese patriarchy has been modified and adapted in relation to colonial modernity, and its role in globalization and postcolonialism in Hong Kong.

The Global Civil Society and Political Transition: Opportunities and Limits of Local Women's Activism

In the 1980s, Hong Kong entered a phase of transition. The British and Chinese governments reached an agreement in 1984 to revert Hong Kong's sovereignty from the former to the latter on 1 July 1997 as a special administration region (the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, or HKSAR). This was under the arrangement of "one country, two systems" and "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong," which aimed to preserve Hong Kong's capitalist system under China's sovereignty. China's claim to Hong Kong's sovereignty (which Britain took by force in the nineteenth century) was its reason for excluding Hong Kong people from any claim to self-determination or

any say in the negotiation process. Such an arrangement, unprecedented in the history of British imperialism, destined Hong Kong to a phase of political change totally different from that in other former colonies. Instead of undergoing decolonization, Hong Kong's path of political and economic development was to be dictated by another sovereign power. The Beijing government, in alliance with the economic and administrative elites of Hong Kong, envisaged that the continuing success of capitalism in Hong Kong depended on the preservation of an authoritarian political system in collaboration with its noninterventionist economic doctrine. Thus, in designing the new political institutions of the HKSAR, the basic framework of the colonial institutions was preserved (Lee 1999). Essentially, the formal ending of colonial rule brought about a process of recolonization only. What is more, as Chow (1995) characterizes, Hong Kong was politically stuck between the two colonizers – the outgoing colonial power and the incoming authoritarian regime, both of which claimed to represent the true interests of Hong Kong. Attempts by Hong Kong people to have an independent voice were silenced by both Britain and China. The loss of voice between the patriotic rhetoric of China and the moral rhetoric of Britain (in claiming that it had the moral responsibility to take care of the interests of its colonial subjects) made up what Chow termed the “in-betweenness” of Hong Kong's situation.

Nonetheless, the period also witnessed the strengthening of the civil society, as the vital political changes mobilized various social forces to present their own agenda on the city's future development. Many new political groups were formed in this period, with several issues permeating their political agenda. First, there was the issue of national identity. China's dominant discourse resorted to nationalism and patriotism to silence any local dissent against the legitimacy of the “one country, two systems” policy and the “return to the motherland.” This led to the production of oppositional discourses on the real meaning of being Chinese and patriotic, and the proliferation of a local Hong Kong identity. Second, the promise of “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong” elicited discussion on what the postcolonial political system should be like, as issues of democratization, civil liberty, and social justice were reflected on. Many of the group participants were social activists of the 1970s (So 1999, ch. 3). Colonial resistance, reflection on one's Chinese identity, and the formation of a local Hong Kong identity were thus integral to the postcolonial subjectivity. In this sense, the rise of an indigenous women's movement in the 1980s was part of the post-coloniality. Before the 1980s, there were only a few women's groups, most dominated by either expatriate women or the wives of upper-middle-class men who joined women's groups for charity work.¹¹ In the 1980s, there was a proliferation of women's concern groups with a clear stance on gender equality. Women who came from the grassroots and had had the opportunity to

obtain tertiary education and participate in students' movements of the 1970s formed some of the first local women's organizations with feminist stances – the Association for the Advancement of Feminism (AAF) and the Hong Kong Women Christian Council (HKWCC) being two such groups. Indeed, the leading members of these women's groups stressed the indigenous nature of their organizations by striving to represent the voices of Hong Kong women, especially those who were oppressed. The quest for a local feminist identity and for a national identity were intertwined, as the activists reflected on how feminist issues should be an integral part of the postcolonial institutions (Choi 1995; Lui 1997). The political transition also created opportunities for political participation as popular elections were introduced to the local legislature (the legislative council) and district organizations (the municipal councils and the district boards). Some women seized the chance to run for office or participate in electoral activities. Women's issues were brought onto the political agenda by politicians who wished to gain women's popular support. But the formation of these oppositional discourses also alarmed the future sovereign (Lui 1997, ch. 5). A women's group (the Hong Kong Federation of Women) was formed under the orchestration of China to align pro-China forces among women in support of the incoming authoritarian regime.

The international human rights regime and the international women's movement were important global forces that interplayed with the political transition and the emerging postcolonial feminist voice. The international women's movement in particular emerged as a global civil society in the 1990s, after decades of activism by international women's groups.¹² Before the 1990s, human rights legislation and women's rights legislation were absent from the territory, mainly for three reasons: (1) the colonial regime was reluctant to legislate to protect civil rights, on the grounds that many of its principles ran counter to colonial domination; (2) British colonial rule tended to incorporate if not preserve the institutions indigenous to its governance structure in order to provide stability and legitimacy; and (3) the idea of gender equality ran counter to the interests of local conservatives and business interests. In the 1990s, after the Tiananmen Square massacre, the outgoing colonial power adopted international human rights and antidiscrimination standards in Hong Kong through domestic legislation. This was in reaction to both local and international pressures, and done in the hope that it would protect the people from suppression of civil liberties by the incoming authoritarian forces (and hence facilitate an honourable imperial retreat).

In Chapter 2, "Engendering a Legal System," Carole J. Petersen gives a detailed account of how local women's groups successfully seized the opportunity arising from political transition and democratization to bring gender issues onto the public agenda. They were able to pressure the colonial

government to adopt the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and enact the Sex Discrimination Ordinance in the mid-1990s. The biggest obstacle to further advancement of women's rights was the attitude of the government and the business interests that saw such legislation as destructive intervention in a market where the ethos of individualism and free competition should reign. Petersen also assesses the impact of sex discrimination legislation on gender equality. In Chapter 3, "Women's Activism during Hong Kong's Political Transition," Lisa Fischler presents a study of two cases of women's activism. The first, the United Nations Fourth World Women's Conference, held in Beijing in 1995, was an occasion for two women's coalitions, the Hong Kong NGO Working Group and the Hong Kong Women's Coalition for Beijing '95, to present contending views on women's issues. The two groups had drastically different views on the situation of women in Hong Kong, what and how changes should be brought about, the role of women in the political transition, and, most important, their relationship with China. The case illustrated how the search for a new gender identity was enmeshed in the issue of postcolonialism and nationalism. The second case, the 1994 and 1995 elections, illustrates how the public sphere, and hence women's participation, was circumscribed by the outgoing colonial regime, the incoming authoritarian regime, and the local political forces caught in the struggle between them. The persistence of patriarchy in both families and organizations was also an obstacle to women's political participation.

Economic Globalization and Class Formation among Women

Economically, Hong Kong was integrated into the emerging global capitalist system. The precursor to change was the waning of its manufacturing industry amidst the rise of other newly industrialized and industrializing countries. Hong Kong capitalists survived by joining the fleet of global mobile capital. They took advantage of China's "open door" policy and relocated much of the production process ("outward processing") to southern China, where cheap (female) labour abounded. Hong Kong's economy was restructured from labour-intensive export-oriented manufacturing to the service industry, as it re-emerged as a major entrepôt of China and became an integral part of the regional economy of the China-Guangdong-Zhujiang Delta (Lo and Yeung 1996). Its economic lifeblood became tied to the provision of financial and commercial service to international and local businesses that were interested in the thriving China and Asia-Pacific markets. Deindustrialization resulted in changes in the structure of the labour market, displacing from the job market low-skilled manual labourers who could not be totally reabsorbed by the service industry.

The economic restructuring resulted in the class polarization of women. The expanding demand for human resources in the service sector provided

well-educated women with opportunities to enter managerial and professional careers, and hence to move up to middle-class positions. Employment figures and statistics show that the career attainments of men and women were hardly equal. Horizontal and vertical segregation were blatant in the labour market.¹³ Still, well-educated middle-class women have gained significant socioeconomic power vis-à-vis working-class women, whose economic situation deteriorated as manufacturing industries moved out of Hong Kong. Many working-class women were literally redomesticated, since they were no longer employable, and became dependants of their spouses or the social welfare system. Others joined the army of the emerging underpaid serving class, which included janitors, sales assistants, domestic helpers, and waitresses.

Did the class polarization of women facilitate the formation of a postcolonial feminist discourse? Chapter 4 by Eliza Lee and Chapter 5 by Stephen Wing-Kai Chiu and Ching-Kwan Lee provide some clues to the answer to this question. Lee's "Individualism and Patriarchy" shows that women lawyers who were interviewed were highly receptive of the patriarchal gender norms of familial responsibility and were highly satisfied with the status quo when it came to gender equality in the workplace and the society as a whole. The individualistic ethos was constitutive of their subjectivities and has conferred on the women professionals a sense of agency and free choice amidst the oppressive aspects of patriarchy and capitalism. Chiu and Lee's "Withering Away of the Hong Kong Dream?" shows that among the women workers adversely affected by economic restructuring, there was a general sense of demoralization if not disillusionment over the long-cherished "success ethics" that celebrate individual efforts to improve one's livelihood. That these women also found it difficult to articulate their subjective experience of suffering is structurally rooted in the injustice of the patriarchal and economic institutions at large.

Internal Colonialization or In-Betweenness?

Gender Perspectives on Hong Kong's Political Status

The problem of postcoloniality in Hong Kong is a unique and complex one. Hong Kong was a colony that successfully underwent industrialization and capitalization, and a colony that ended up not attaining national independence but, rather, being handed over to a sovereign power which it has substantial cultural ties with but which also subjected it to continued authoritarian rule. Scholars have characterized Hong Kong's postcoloniality in two ways. Rey Chow (1993, 1995), for instance, regards Hong Kong as being caught between two colonizers, Britain and China. This marginalized position "brings with it a certain privilege of observation," but also devoids it of a real voice. But according to Chen and other local scholars, since the

1980s, Hong Kong has acquired through its economic development the position of the colonizer in the Asian region. Chen (1994) uses the term “sub-empire” to refer to the newly risen Asian economic power, and regards its exploitation of the less developed countries in the region as a form of internal colonialization. Hung (1995) uses the term “Northbound colonialism” to characterize Hong Kong’s economic and cultural colonization of mainland China. To him, the discourse of in-betweenness is simply a form of self-victimization that complements the project of constructing the Self-Other relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China.

Indeed, in the 1980s, with the dual event of Hong Kong’s return to China and China’s open door policy, two related discourses on the Hong Kong-China relationship emerged. Chinese authorities, local business interests, scholars, and political commentators believe that Hong Kong can help China modernize and develop economically through the former’s capital, strategic location, and, most importantly, demonstrative effect of its own successful experience of modernization. Indeed, mainstream local and national opinion regards Hong Kong as the most progressive and modernized Chinese city, and believes that China can build its socialist market economy by learning Hong Kong’s management and legal systems. To this end, the Chinese authority and its local supporters constructed a political nationalistic discourse. It stated that reunification, or the return of Hong Kong to China, was the highest political moral principle. This patriotic cause stipulated that Hong Kong be subsumed under the political parameter defined by China. Any act of defiance amounted to meddling with the nationalistic project and an act of complicity with the British imperialists. The economic and nationalistic discourses worked together to characterize Hong Kong as China’s economic and cultural colonizer on the one hand and its politically colonized on the other.

Chapters 6 and 7 by Ka-Ming Wu and Wai-Ching Wong respectively serve to illustrate Hong Kong’s peculiar position as both colonized and colonizer from the conceptual lenses of gender. Wu’s “Discourse on *Baau Yih Naai* (Keeping Concubines)” analyzes a discourse arising from an increasing number of Hong Kong men keeping a concubine in China. Wu argues that the case illustrates the construction of the citizenship and identity of Hong Kong people through the ethnicization of the Chinese Other. The citizenship of Hong Kong is constructed in terms of ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. Wong’s “Negotiating Gender Identity” traces Hong Kong Christian women’s historical experience of marginality as ongoing struggles between their religious faith and nationalistic loyalty. Wong illustrates how the opportunities for oppositional discourse and hence women’s liberation were offered by the marginal position these Christian women occupied.

International Migration: Women as Agents for Constructing a Diasporic Hong Kong Identity

The political uncertainties of the 1997 sovereignty handover gave rise in the 1980s and 1990s to a massive exodus of professionals, managers, and entrepreneurs, mainly to Western countries such as Canada, Australia, Britain, and the United States. These educated and comparatively well-off Chinese migrants were distinguished not only by their abundant cultural and material resources but also by their instrumental approach to the notion of citizenship. Ong (1993) uses the term “flexible citizenship” to describe such Hong Kong migrants, referring especially to “the strategies and effects of mobile managers, technocrats, and professionals seeking to both circumvent and benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments, work, and family relocation” (112). Ong argues that this conception of citizenship is a part of “diasporan-Chinese modernity,” which has its historical roots in the experience of the Chinese comprador class that emerged under Western colonial capitalism in Southeast Asia in the late nineteenth century, and which places familial interests above societal well-being or political loyalty. Flexible citizenship is thus the manifestation of individualism and familialism in the context of globalization.

In Chapter 8, “Empowering Mobility,” Siumi Maria Tam explains how gender is crucial to the making of flexible citizenship. For many Hong Kong migrant families, the husbands would continue to stay and work in Hong Kong, while the wives and children settled down in the new host countries. The wives, many of whom were professionals in Hong Kong, gave up their careers and returned to domesticity. Tam’s ethnographic study illustrates how these women were agents in reconstructing the Chinese patriarchal family. Through their maternal role in the newly constructed matricentric families, these women were agents for negotiating a new diasporic and cosmopolitan Chinese identity. Tam thus shows how gender is central to international migration and labour mobility, and under what conditions women act as agents in the construction of transnational identities.

The chapters in this book illuminate the complex interactive relationship between globalization, postcolonialism, and Chinese patriarchy, as well as the complex and sometimes conflicting effects these categories of forces have given rise to. The chapters also illustrate the multiple ways Hong Kong women exercise their agencies, according to their positionings in the midst of these complex forces. The concluding chapter briefly discusses the opportunities and constraints on the emergence of a critical feminist discourse offered by these developments.

Notes

- 1 For a comprehensive overview of women and the colonial state in Hong Kong, see Kwok et al. (1997).
- 2 For one classic work that bears such an old assumption, see Lau (1982).
- 3 For a deeper understanding of the relationship between these male elites and the early colonial government, see Tsai (1993); Carroll (1999); Hui (1999); Chiu and Hung (1999).
- 4 In 1963, The Chinese University of Hong Kong was established. Before that, the University of Hong Kong was the only major university in Hong Kong.
- 5 In the 1990s, the number of universities increased from two to eight.
- 6 For some historical evidence on women and employment in Hong Kong, see Jones (1990, 16) and Faure (1997, 183-90).
- 7 According to the findings of Chiu and Lee (see Chapter 5), from 1984 to 1994, manufacturing employment was reduced by 39.2 percent, whereas financial and business services, and transport and communication shot up by 132 percent and 64 percent respectively. The number of female employees in manufacturing dropped by more than 61 percent from 1987 to 1995.
- 8 Appadurai (1990) identifies five dimensions of global cultural flow, which he terms ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, finanscapas, and ideoscapas.
- 9 The experience of Western imperialist invasion in the late nineteenth century and the political revolution of China in the early twentieth century had led to a women's liberation movement (as part of the nationalistic May Fourth Movement), the availability of educational opportunities to a limited sector of women, the exposure of women to Western liberal thought, and the active participation of women in political life.
- 10 Smith called these women "protected women." They were mostly from the Tanka boat population, a marginalized group living in the Pearl River delta and coastal area. According to Smith (1995), these women had little to lose by associating with foreigners, because of their marginal position in Chinese society.
- 11 Examples of early women's organizations include the Young Women Christian Association and the Hong Kong Chinese Women's Club. The Hong Kong Council of Women, formed in 1947, was probably the first women's group with a strong advocacy stance. Its members were mostly expatriate women.
- 12 See Peters and Wolper (1995) for a historical account of the emergence of the international women's movement.
- 13 Statistical analysis by some scholars shows that, in 1991, women constituted 23.4 percent of the managers and administrators, 33.9 percent of the professionals, 34.3 percent of the associate professionals, and 69.7 percent of the clerks. Women's earnings are about 70 percent of men's. Labour-force participation was 47.8 percent for women and 76 percent for men. See Hong Kong (1997a, 1997b).

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