AUTHOR: Loretta Ieng Tak Lou

TITLE: “The Power of Example: Green Living and Transformative Activism in Hong Kong”

1. Describe briefly what this work sets out to do and for whom it is intended.

This work sets out to introduce green people who engage in green living movements in Hong Kong and explain their emergence in the larger socio-political context of Hong Kong. It is intended for students, scholars, and general readers.

1. Does this manuscript make a truly significant contribution to the field? Why or why not?

The manuscript, in its current form, is not likely to make a truly significant contribution to the field for two reasons. First, the author did not clearly place green living movements within the environmental movement and/or civil society landscape in Hong Kong. It is fine to study minor movements/activism/groups (if green people are such). However, if the author calls the subject of her study a movement, she should clearly identify the population of her study. The reader currently has few clues with which to gauge the presence of this movement and the degree of its impact on Hong Kong society. Although the author presents interesting environmental examples (e.g., a wedding reception meal), I wondered how prevalent the author’s evidence is. This is especially important if the author wants to argue that this movement is transformative.

The above-mentioned point relates to the lack of a systematic discussion on the data collection methodology: Where are her fieldsites overall? How did she choose her fieldsites? How, and how often, did she get in touch with the people she calls “examplars?” Although she introduces a few key leaders (guru), the reader would like to know how influential they are and how prevalent their followers are in Hong Kong. I felt that the author is hesitant to discuss her methodology in detail and sometimes defensive. Be assured that good data is generated based on quality rather than quantity.

Secondly, although the author states that she conducted ethnographic research from 2013-23, the majority of the data in the manuscript is drawn from her earlier fieldwork periods, which took place in the early 2010s. The inclusion of new data on her subject population is especially important if the author intends to tie the movements with socio-political changes in Hong Kong.

1. Is the scholarship sound? Has the author gone to all the right sources and made the best use of them? Do the conclusions flow from the evidence presented?

The lack of new data is also pronounced in other parts of the manuscript. It would be nice if the reader could see updated data on the average income of Hong Kongers as well as statistics and public opinion survey information on “the increasing endorsement of environmental protection and green living since the early 2010s” (p.84). If the author could present micro and macro aspects of the evidence on new environmentalism in HK, her overall arguments would be much stronger. This is important because the author intends to connect the population of her study to a larger socio-political change in Hong Kong. In addition, the literature which the author cites is sometimes limited. For example, the literature she cites in chapter 3 was published in or before 2013 and the literature she cites in chapter 2 was published in or before 2014 (except her own work). Some chapters are better than others in terms of the inclusion of new literature. Adding new literature across all the chapters would be useful and appropriate.

1. How do you rate the manuscript’s organization?

I like it.

1. How do you rate the documentation? Is it appropriate, adequate, and consistent?

While her larger arguments sound interesting, there are some key omissions in the details (e.g., lack of references, evidence, explanations, etc.). The author should not assume that the reader is familiar with certain terms. I recommend that the author use footnotes more to add explanations and clarifications.

There is some redundant information. Some information is scattered over different chapters. When the author first introduces the information on organizations, acronyms, etc., she does not fully provide their information adequately. Then, I would find the information in the next chapter, etc. For example, the author introduces “Club O” in Chapter 1 (p.37), but does not reveal the relationship between Club O and one of the three key spiritual figures until Chapter 3. Another example is when the author first introduces “indigenous villagers” in chapter 4 without explaining who they are, then she extensively discusses them in Chapter 5. Although “Gaia school” shows up early in the manuscript, it is not revealed until the last chapter that it is a primary school.

Some sections appear to be odd. For example, “The rise and fall of HK’s local agriculture (pp.111-114 in Chapter 6), which is a historical section, appears to come in the middle of a section on food safety/security discourses. Perhaps, reorganize these sections?

There is some inaccurate information. For example, Ming-Sho Ho is not a political scientist but a sociologist.

1. How do you rate the writing? Is it clear and interesting? Is the style appropriate for the subject and the intended audience?

The writing style is appropriate for the subject and the intended audience. However, there are several typos, grammatical errors, and quotation errors (Pp. 21, 22, 34, 66, 117, and 128).

1. Will this work prove useful to interested readers outside this field, whether scholars in other disciplines or general readers? If so, to whom and to what extent?

It would be useful to undergraduate students and scholars in humanity-based Environmental Studies, Religious studies, and Area (Hong Kong) Studies.

1. How does this work compete with, complement, or otherwise compare with other available books? Please comment briefly on the titles you cite.

I do not think that this book directly competes with other books as there are few books in social sciences on environmental activism/spirituality in Hong Kong. In general, the subject of this manuscript may be placed in the category of religious studies.

Scholarly books on environmental issues in Hong Kong have been limited and have centered on particular environmental activism/movements (e.g., NIBYism), NGO-based activism, and/or a government’s efforts in relation to urban planning or policies. In some of these books, Hong Kong may not even be a stand-alone subject of focus, rather one of the book chapters on Asia, or part of discussions on China.

This book may indirectly complement books whose focus is on Taiwan. Hong Kong and China are often regarded as similar because both are islands, both had a similar trajectory of economic development, both are culturally Chinese, and both have a unique political relationship with China. As part of her study population, the author includes HK people who are part of the Tzu Chi movement, which originated in Taiwan. There are books on environmental activism/spirituality in Taiwan in the fields of social science and religious studies. Although the following books focus on organization-based movements (a religious organization and NGOs), some of these movements grew into organizational forms, but they began what the author of this manuscript calls “quiet individual actions” (p.12). The Tzu Chi movement, in particular, began as “quiet individual actions.” Thus, I think that these books are relevant to hers.

*Democracy’s Dharma: Religious Renaissance and Political Development in Taiwan* by Richard Madsen. It connects the emergence of the Tzu Chi movement to Taiwan’s Political change (democratization).

*Ecofamilism: Women, Religion, and Environmental Protection in Taiwan* by Wan-Li Ho. It looks at six environmental NGOs in Taiwan from the feminist and religious perspectives, including Chinese religio-cultural traditions of responsibility to the family.

1. Does this work have classroom potential? If so, for what kinds of classes and at what level?

Yes. Its potential would be for undergraduate lower-level (100-200 level) courses in Anthropology, Religious studies, and humanity-based environmental studies.

1. Would there be potential interest in this work abroad?

Yes, depending on how well the author revises the manuscript to appeal to other social sciences.

1. If the manuscript needs further work:

(a)   Does it show enough potential that we should encourage the author to undertake the necessary revisions? Yes.

(b)   Do you feel that the author is capable of making these revisions?

It depends on how much follow-up data she has and how much new information she could add to the conversation in the current manuscript. The author says that the duration of her ethnographic research is from 2013-23. Yet, the manuscript does not show the richness of her data, which, in my estimation, skews toward the early 2010s.

(c)   Is the manuscript longer (or shorter) than it needs to be to make its case most effectively?

The length could be a little bit longer if the author adds new data and some explanations. However, if the author eliminates some redundancy that the current manuscript has, the length could be similar to the current length.

(d)   What are your general and specific suggestions for revision? Please be as generous with suggestions as your time and resources allow.

In addition to the weaknesses that I have already discussed, I recommend the following:

As the author is well aware, HK’s civil society landscape has drastically changed since the time when the author conducted her dissertation research, especially after the enactment of the national security law. How has it impacted green people and green living movements? The author needs to add more direct evidence from her subjects after these changes. The author discusses this to some extent in chapter 6. However, she should do more and do it better.

In the last chapter, the author should add her book’s contributions to the current status of HK studies. As she said on p. 126, some scholars are afraid that HK will receive less scholarly attention in the future.

1. Did you find this manuscript stimulating? Did you enjoy reading it? Is this something you would recommend to others?

It was an easy read. I enjoyed reading it, but I did not personally find it stimulating. This is because I found it hard to make connections between the subject population of her study and the larger transformation of the Hong Kong society. I can only recommend it to others who are interested in environmental spirituality/spiritual activism in Hong Kong.

1. Feel free to offer additional comments and suggestions that have not been addressed by the above questions. n/a
2. In sum:
3. I strongly recommend publication and have suggested optional revisions.
4. I recommend publication and have suggested optional revisions.
5. I recommend publication only if the specified revisions are satisfactorily completed.
6. I do not recommend publication.

C. is recommended especially if the author seeks to appeal to wider audiences, including other social science disciplines.

We hope you will feel free to offer additional comments and suggestions that have not been addressed by these questions. Comments for the editor or individual contributors would be most welcome. Thank you.

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