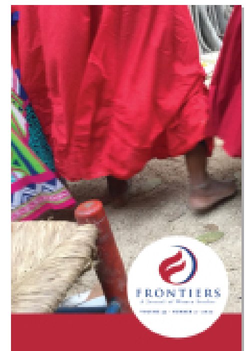
Towards a Differential Ethics of Belonging in a Transnational Context: Navigating the Hong Kong Movement in the US in 2020 and 2021



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Towards a Differential Ethics of Belonging in a Transnational Context

Navigating the Hong Kong Movement in the US in 2020 and 2021

SHUI-YIN SHARON YAM

Abstract: In this autoethnography, I reflect on my experience navigating the tension among different groups of local and diasporic Hongkongers as we experienced three key events: the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020, the US presidential election, and the rise of anti-Chinese and anti-Asian sentiments in the US. Through concepts from feminist and queer theories, such as differential belonging, disidentification, and transformative justice, I highlight moments of transnational coalition and barriers that render cross-national and cross-cultural solidarities difficult.

Keywords: Autoethnography, social movement, transnationalism, differential belonging, Hong Kong

Beginning in June 2019 and well into the beginning of the pandemic, Hong Kong experienced its most violent anti-authoritarian protest against the Hong Kong and Chinese governments. To curtail the movement, the government implemented the draconian National Security Law (NSL) at the end of June 2020. The law criminalizes any political activities and antigovernment sentiments—both local and transnational—as potentially seditious. Collaborations with organizers outside of Hong Kong could be seen as "colluding with foreign and external forces" by the government.[1] Offenders could face life imprisonment. By early 2021 over ten thousand people were arrested, including seasoned pro-democracy politicians and activists; as the *Washington Post* puts it, "every prominent Hong Kong activist is either in jail or exile."[2] Around the same time, amidst the rising geopolitical tension between Beijing and Washington, I found myself at the nexus of two grassroots resistance efforts—the anti-authoritarian movement in Hong Kong, and the Movement for Black Lives in the US. While I had been living in the US for the past fourteen years, I was born and raised in Hong Kong with close family ties to the city. I am

also a transnational rhetoric scholar-teacher, and a participant in diasporic Hong Kong leftist organizing and discursive spaces. Throughout this period, I have had deeply transformative exchanges with leftist, diasporic Hong Kong activists in the West; anonymous local Hongkongers on social media spaces; and my own family members and close friends in Hong Kong. These conversations and relationships illuminated to me that in a transnational context our different lived experiences and positionalities could become ground for solidarity and coalition, but they could also wreak havoc on our relation to one another and to the movement itself. As Etienne Wenger points out, a community of practice is a group of people who engage in shared practices and discourse to address a common concern; by doing so, they cultivate a shared identity as well that delineates members from nonmembers.[3] The political events in 2020 made clear that many local Hongkongers and diasporic Hong Kong leftists occupied different communities of practice: while they were both concerned about Hong Kong's political future, they articulated different strategies, visions, and identities. Through my vantage point, I witnessed how Hongkongers from different positionalities struggled to navigate their complex relationships to state powers, to each other in the movement, and to their co-strugglers across state and racial boundaries. As Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih remark, "More often than not, minority subjects identify themselves in opposition to a dominant discourse rather than vis-à-vis each other and other minority groups. We study the center and the margin but rarely examine the relationships among different margins."[4] By examining my experiences navigating the tension among local and diasporic Hongkongers from different positionalities, I focus not on the US or China as competing centers, but rather on how we navigate the tensions at the transnational margin amidst the backdrop of geopolitical struggle, authoritarianism, antiblackness, and anti-Asian xenophobia.

In this critical autoethnography, I reflect on my experience as someone who straddles both communities of practice—or what Etienne Wenger call "ambivalent spaces of multimembership."[5] Wenger posits that people who are located simultaneously in different communities of practice are poised to serve as brokers who engage in "processes of translation, coordination, and alignment between perspectives."[6] In the context of Hong Kong, these processes were only made more complex by geopolitical tension, transnational gaps of experiences, and ongoing state violence and persecution. As I brokered across different Hong Kong communities, I realized that while spaces of multi-membership carried the generative potential to unearth coalitional possibilities across difference, they could be an emotionally difficult terrain to occupy as it entails a subjectivity that refuses to align oneself staunchly with

a single identity. Amidst the dominant expectation that one must be loyal to one's narrowly defined community and identity especially in times of crisis, to broker across different circles is to always transverse across liminalities, never fully belonging comfortably to each.

Being both a diasporic Hongkonger and a researcher who studies Hong Kong politics and grassroots advocacy, my subjectivity does not fit the binary model of research subject/object. As I navigate the complex tension across different positionalities, I do not want to posit a singular truth claim that eclipses other interpretations. Hence, I adopt critical autoethnography and storytelling as my primary mode of inquiry to make sense of how I experienced the tensions among different pro-movement Hongkonger communities. Intersectional feminists of color have argued for the value of storytelling as a mode of knowledge-making as it allows stakeholders to grapple with unresolved tensions and multiplicities.[7] As autoethnographic scholars posit, autoethnography entails a simultaneously introspective inward gaze, and an outwardly focused one to articulate the relationship between the writer-researcher and others in the community.[8] Since I navigated these ideological and emotional tensions primarily on digital spaces, I draw also on the method of digital ethnography: I observed, participated in, and analyzed discourse that occurred on different social media and messaging platforms, noting how platform affordances and social media norms impacted the relationships we built.[9] By doing so, I contextualize my experiences, and offer an aerial view of the rhetorical and political ecology in which I write. To make sense of my own experience and observations as a broker whose senses of belonging are multiple and fractured, I draw on intersectional queer and feminist scholarship to articulate a framework of solidarity and resistance that refuses "a hierarchy of liberation agendas," and that recognizes how our interests are bound up with others even in a transnational context.[10]

This article is difficult to compose not only because it hinges upon different layers of transnational trauma and political struggles, but also because authoritarian state persecution has rendered acts of storytelling potentially hazardous. The day after the implementation of the NSL, the Hong Kong Twitter accounts that I followed were either deleted or scrubbed clean by users who worried that they would be prosecuted for their speech. As a result, many pro-democracy Hongkongers—both local and diasporic—were anonymous on social media spaces. Because the NSL incriminates people and activities both in and outside of Hong Kong, diasporic Hongkongers are not entirely safe from persecution either. In diasporic Hong Kong organizing, activists prioritize each person's own risk assessment and privacy. The security risks posed by the NSL drastically limited the channels local and diasporic

Hongkongers could openly and candidly communicate with each other as the NSL sows distrust among people. As a result of the NSL and my geographic location in the American South away from major diasporic Hong Kong communities, I had communicated and worked closely with many local and diasporic Hongkongers without having met them in person or knowing their real full name. To protect the safety and privacy of people I have interacted with, my descriptions are at times purposefully vague.

This essay is structured around three key events as I navigated the fissures between local Hongkongers in mainstream movement discourse and diasporic Hong Kong leftists: the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in the summer of 2020, the US presidential election, and the rise of anti-Chinese and anti-Asian sentiments in the US. I chose to focus on these events as they made clear that events that on the surface appeared US–centric were nevertheless transnational. As they trafficked in transnational affective and discursive economies, these events became networked with local social movements and sentiments in Hong Kong. I write about these moments recursively to mirror the way I experienced them, and to highlight the different forms in which ideological and experiential differences played out among different groups of Hong Kong activists. To situate the three key events, I will first present an aerial view of the rhetorical and political context.

CONTEXT AND STAKEHOLDERS

It would be reductive to posit a binary between local and diasporic Hongkongers, as each of these communities encompass significant internal differences. While I will often evoke the Left/Right political divide as used in the US context, it is worth noting that this framework does not map neatly on the public discourse in Hong Kong.[11] As Avery Ng, a democratic socialist in Hong Kong, noted, the authoritarian Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is equated with the Left in Hong Kong, even though in a Western framework, the CCP would be considered Far Right.[12] As I attempt to contextualize the Hong Kong political context to an audience outside of Hong Kong, I am acutely aware of this discursive slippage.

In the local context, localists, pan-democrats, leftists, and key opinion leaders (KOLs) have been influential to different extents in shaping the current discourse about the movement. Since the return of Hong Kong's sovereignty from Britain to China in 1997, local Hongkongers have been demanding universal suffrage and resisting the political encroachment of the Chinese government through largely peaceful marches. After the Umbrella Movement in 2014, however, many young protesters were disillusioned by the

pan-democratic party's peaceful approach as the movement did not result in any policy changes. Such disappointment gave rise to a new political ideology outside of the long established pan-democratic camp: Hong Kong localism, which emphasizes local culture and identity.[13] Hongkongers who identify as localists do not all share the same political vision: while some embrace progressive values and emphasize grassroots community empowerment and participation, the more vocal faction in recent years is built in part on nativism, "xenophobia and exclusionary politics" against mainland Chinese people.[14] Because they focused on distancing Hong Kong from mainland China, nativist localism often dismissed coalition potential between Hongkongers and mainland Chinese activists.[15] As the Chinese government implemented economic and immigration policies to facilitate the integration of Hong Kong into the Chinese state, Hongkongers experienced a loss of local culture, language, community, land, and economic autonomy. The influx of mainland Chinese immigrants, businesspeople, and tourists, hence, was perceived by Hongkongers as a form of colonialism. As the tension between Hongkongers and the Chinese government intensified, bias against mainland Chinese people also became more prominent and widely accepted among Hongkongers.[16] During the 2019 movement, eager to gain more followers, Hong Kong KOLs on YouTube harnessed such nativist sentiments and began spreading exclusionary, right-wing ideologies and dis/misinformation among movement supporters.[17] They appealed widely to Hongkongers who were anti-China, but nevertheless held socially and politically conservative values.

Other than China's encroachment, dominant localist discourse did not often account for other forms of inequities in Hong Kong, such as racism and socioeconomic injustice.[18] Because of Hong Kong's colonial legacy and the ideological stronghold of neoliberalism in Hong Kong, this narrative often goes unchallenged.[19] Leftist organizations in Hong Kong such as the League of Social Democrats (LSD) and the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU) had, on the other hand, been advocating for a more intersectional approach.[20] In their organizing strategies, both groups focused on cultivating relationships and solidarity with marginalized groups in Hong Kong, such as working-class people, migrant workers, the queer community, and racial and ethnic minorities.[21] These groups also sought to cultivate solidarity with grassroots movements outside of Hong Kong. When most Hongkongers responded to BLM with suspicion and skepticism, the LSD organized a small protest outside of the American Consulate in Hong Kong in support of Black activists.[22] Meanwhile, CTU supported labor rights in mainland China, and issued solidarity statements in support for anti-authoritarian activists in Belarus, Thailand, and the Philippines.[23] These views were widely

shared by diasporic Hong Kong leftists who resided in the West. Like some local leftists, diasporic Hongkongers on the Left are critical of the xenophobia against mainland Chinese people, as we see coalitional potential with Chinese dissidents. While they oppose the authoritarian rule of the CCP, diasporic Hong Kong leftists do not see Western state governments as the solution to the crackdown in Hong Kong. Instead, they focus on cultivating solidarity with other antiauthoritarian grassroots movements.[24]

Amidst the more dominant localist and nativist narrative, however, leftist voices were marginalized in the movement. Diasporic leftist voices and more fringe leftist organizations in Hong Kong were often criticized by mainstream movement supporters as unpragmatic, and detached from the actual struggles of people on the ground. Cultural studies scholar Po-keung Hui attributed that misalignment, in part, to those organizations' inability or unwillingness to communicate openly with Hongkongers who did not immediately identify with their agenda or language.[25] Local and diasporic leftists also did not always see eye-to-eye. For example, they disagreed on whether it was appropriate to call COVID the "Wuhan Virus"; during the US presidential election, several local leftists articulated their support for Trump, much to the disappointment of their diasporic peers.[26]

As a leaderless movement, mainstream movement discourse promoted an ethos of solidarity and internal coherence.[27] During the 2019 protest, pan-democratic party, localists, and established leftist organizations were in conversation with another across political differences.[28] Cross-faction deliberation, however, remained limited. Popular protest slogans, such as "No snitching, no severing ties," and "Brothers climbing mountains together, each in their own way," emphasized staunch loyalty towards fellow activists, which, as Francis Ho and Petula Ho point out, sometimes came at the expense of internal critiques and deliberation.[29] In online spaces where Hong Kong activists communicated and organized anonymously, people who questioned dominant protest tactics and advocacy strategies were criticized as not committed enough to the movement.[30] Because of this dynamic, Hong Kong leftists faced a constant dilemma: If they criticized oppressive elements in the movement—such as physical violence and discrimination against mainland Chinese people, and the use of misogynist and sexist tropes against women—they risked being further marginalized in the mainstream movement, but if they remained silent, harmful practices would be left unchecked.[31]

Similar dynamics and political differences existed among diasporic Hongkongers. Since GOP politicians like Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz were vocal supporters of the Hong Kong movement, diasporic Hongkongers in the US, including those who were democrats, tended to support the Trump adminis-

tration at the election.[32] As transnational subjects who live a minoritized existence in the West, many diasporic Hong Kong leftists understand that state and economic violence is interconnected across nation-states.[33] For instance, while the US government criticized China for suppressing Hong Kong protesters with rampant police brutality, the US State Department had offered professional training to that very same police force.[34] The diasporic Hong Kong leftists I had collaborated with occupied different positionalities: while some were, like me, born and raised in Hong Kong before settling abroad, others grew up in the US or Canada as members of minoritized communities. In addition to supporting the Hong Kong movement, many are also involved with labor, antiracist, and anti-police activism in the communities they reside.[35]

Dominant narratives on transnational geopolitics tend to reduce people in non-Western contexts into either heroes or villains. This binary portrayal gives the authors and readers the illusion that they can fully understand complex transnational dynamics and the lived experiences of others. In a progressive US context, the exclusionary strategies and beliefs of mainstream local Hongkongers have been weaponized by some to villainize the entire movement.[36] Following Aurora Levins Morales's advice, I resist this narrative pattern by attuning to "what is contradictory about our own impulses toward solidarity."[37] Grassroots movements and solidarities amidst long-standing structures of colonialism, white supremacy, and transnational authoritarianism are messy, contingent, and always in a state of becoming. My narrative, hence, does not tie up all—or any—loose ends, nor does it posit determinate solutions. Rather, I seek to highlight the complexities and contradictions of cultivating solidarities with each other and across movements in a transnational context.

SOLIDARITY AND FISSURE: THE HONG KONG MOVEMENT AND BLACK LIVES MATTER

The tension between diasporic Hong Kong leftists and mainstream local Hongkongers was heightened over the summer of 2020 when the US and many cities around the world were embroiled in a racial uprising. While local Hongkongers were quick to demonstrate solidarity with protesters in Belarus, Thailand, and Indonesia, a good number of them were lukewarm and hesitant towards the BLM movement in the US—despite their shared struggle against police violence.[38] I was conducting research at the time on Hong Kong online discourse surrounding BLM. While some local Hongkongers shared protest tactics and engage in dialogues with BLM activists online, there were

also many posts in the popular Hong Kong forum LIHKG that painted Black activists as violent rioters because of their race. During the 2019 protest, LIHKG was used widely by anonymous Hongkongers to collectively organize guerilla-style protests.[39] Many forum users, hence, had firsthand experience organizing and participating in protests in the face of rampant police violence in Hong Kong. However, the shared struggles between Hong Kong and BLM protesters were eclipsed by antiblackness in these posts.

As I continued my research, I realized that US exceptionalism and what Yao Lin calls "beaconism" made it difficult for local Hongkongers to see why the local struggle against authoritarianism and police brutality was connected to the Movement for Black Lives in the US.[40] While several prominent Hong Kong activists, such as Joshua Wong and Jeffrey Ngo, publicly supported BLM, others denied systemic racial injustice in the American criminal justice system.[41] Since the Hong Kong government had never taken complaints of police brutality seriously, that Derek Chauvin would face trial was evidence enough to some local pro-democracy activists that the US would always hold police officers accountable. Omitted in this line of thinking was the long history of slavery and systemic racism that had been tightly woven into the national imaginary and institutional practices of the US. While Hong Kong as a locale had not been a direct part of the transatlantic slave trade, it was not immune from its legacy and from transnational antiblackness.[42] By treating the US as the beacon of democracy with an inherently just criminal justice system, mainstream movement supporters in Hong Kong inadvertently also endorsed the white supremacist and US nationalist logic that obscures how deeply embedded systemic racism is in the existing state apparatus. US beaconism mirrored the colonial nostalgia demonstrated by groups of Hong Kong protesters who deployed former British colonial emblems as protest symbols, and those who called for the "reunification" of Hong Kong with the United Kingdom.[43] While other factors—such as political crackdown by Beijing, and the lack of political self-determination—had contributed to such nostalgia, implicit in both US beaconism and colonial nostalgia was the assumption that Western state governments were democratic ideals, despite their historical and ongoing reliance on racial capitalism.

In mainstream Hong Kong movement discourse, oppressions were perceived as a linear vertical hierarchy rather than in an interconnected network. At the top of the hierarchy was local police violence and the suppression of political freedom by the CCP. Racism—both local and abroad—was not seen as part of the movement's central focus. As Hong Kong Unison, a grassroots advocacy group for ethnic minorities, notes, "In Hong Kong, to bring up the problem of racism is to risk being labeled a 'left plastic' (左膠), a damaging

stereotype frequently attributed to people whose naive idealism gets in the way of pragmatic politics."[44] Due to a long history of classism, de facto segregation, and negative stereotypes against nonwhite ethnic minorities, antiracist efforts were accepted only insofar as they do not "unsettle long-held dominant interests."[45] To add fuel to fire, echoing right-wing conspiracy theories in the US, anti-Beijing media outlets and political commentators in Hong Kong began spreading disinformation about BLM, claiming that the protests in the US were orchestrated and funded by the Chinese government.[46] As I talked with my family in Hong Kong about BLM, they were quick to quote these disinformation campaigns as evidence why Hongkongers should not cultivate alliances with Black activists. They were also wary that by aligning with "Black rioters," the image of the Hong Kong movement would be tarnished internationally. Right-wing disinformation from the US, in other words, effectively strengthened existing anti-Black sentiments in Hong Kong, creating barriers for meaningful forms of transnational grassroots solidarities.

As diasporic activists, we lived at the nexus of intersecting geopolitics and cultural contexts. I wondered how we could most effectively and ethically convey to members of our local community the basis and histories of transnational solidarities, especially when they, too, were embroiled in a deeply traumatizing political turmoil that felt more immediate and urgent than grassroots movements abroad. I asked transnational feminist Margo Okazawa-Rey if there were more effective ways to educate local Hongkongers about Black struggles for racial justice in the US that would help create coalitional potential between Hongkongers and BLM activists. She responded, "Knowing is not the same as understanding. Knowing all the Black history would not make someone an ally if they do not see their struggles as interconnected." In other words, without a coalitional subjectivity and a sense of affective and political affinity, historical narratives of Black struggle alone could not foster transnational and cross-racial solidarities among Hongkongers. Okazawa-Rey's remark reminded me of *deliberative empathy*, a concept I coined in my monograph about racialized subjects' quest for recognition in Hong Kong. I theorize:

> Deliberative empathy combines constitutive deliberative acts with the critical cognitive model of empathy that urges interlocutors to examine and redefine their subjectivity in relation to others, and to acknowledge the overlapping interests amidst their shared material context. . . . Deliberative empathy does not reinforce a binary between pathos and logos, nor does it perpetuate a framework of recognition that hinges upon identification and consensus.[47]

In my book, I argue that acts of storytelling that allow interlocutors to see each other on their own terms "provides a rhetorical platform for [them] to explore their relationships with one another and with the uncontrollable forces in their lives."[48] In moments of political crisis and state persecution, however, the discursive space for such transnational rhetorical acts shrink tremendously. As a feminist rhetorician, I believed in the political and ethical power of storytelling and affect as a generative force for coalitional building. However, as someone whose community was navigating the trauma of ongoing state violence and persecution, I came to realize that unless coalitional subjectivities are already deeply ingrained in movement culture, the capacity to enact deliberative empathy may not be immediately accessible for people whose community's survival is on the line. As Levin Morales acutely observes, "All too often we fight for primacy, insist that the vectors along which violence hurtles toward us matter more than any others, are more urgent. . . . Knowingly or unknowingly, in anger or desperation or ignorance, we keep mobilizing the master's tools to stake our claims to liberation."[49]

As educators and organizers, how can we help each other acknowledge and resist the oppressive tendencies we have been socialized into through histories of colonialism and white supremacy? How can we, during times of turmoil and beyond, cultivate a more expansive view of oppression as interconnected locally and transnationally? Grappling with these questions, I shifted from writing to an academic audience to addressing the Hong Kong public. Without incomprehensible jargons and the delays in academic publishing, I felt that public writing was an effective way to make feminist praxis more accessible. In my column in *Hong Kong Free Press*, I wrote about how Black activists in the US and Hong Kong protesters shared common struggles against police brutality and state persecution. Rather than chastising mainstream Hongkongers for centering their/our own interest at the expense of Black struggles, I chose to focus on the interconnectedness between the two movements: in addition to the shared struggle against police brutality, both movements were vilified by their respective governments in similar dehumanizing language.[50] I was not alone in taking this route: Hong Kong diasporic scholar-activists Alex Chow and Samuel Chan had penned a similar article in Chinese, detailing the history of the Civil Rights Movement and Black disenfranchisement in the US in a manner that was accessible to Hong Kong readers.[51] While it was unclear whether our attempts had swayed public perceptions of BLM and transnational solidarity in Hong Kong, I continued to believe in the need for more narratives that highlight the interconnectedness of grassroots movements.

In addition to endemic antiblackness among Hongkongers and the widespread belief that the US police and legal systems were fundamentally fair and

just, some Hongkongers chose to remain silent over BLM for fear that their demonstration of solidarity would anger Donald Trump and GOP politicians like Tom Cotton, Josh Hawley, and Ted Cruz.[52] Local Hongkongers, affected directly by almost daily arrests, imprisonment, and repression under the NSL, experience the struggle in Hong Kong as more intense and urgent than the BLM movement in the US. As a diasporic subject in the US, however, I saw that the same politicians who claimed to support Hong Kong protesters were also the very same ones who called for harsh crackdown and arrests against Black and Brown activists during the BLM protests in the US. For diasporic Hong Kong leftists who had worked closely alongside Black and Brown activists in the US and Canada, the Hong Kong movement should be focusing on building solidarities with BLM, rather than appealing for the support of conservative political leaders in the US. After watching the eerie parallels between police brutality in Portland, Minneapolis, and Hong Kong, and participating in the months-long BLM protests in Lexington, KY where I resided, I saw the two struggles as interconnected. In addition to witnessing how policing in North America had harmed their co-strugglers, some of my diasporic Hong Kong friends had themselves been victims of police brutality in the West. In our experiences, policing in the West was not more just than that in Hong Kong. Rather, both were designed to maintain the status quo by deploying state violence on those who resisted.

These experiences contributed to what Aime Carillo Rowe calls "differential belonging."[53] Drawing on Third World intersectional feminisms, differential belonging challenges the assumption that our allegiances and identities are singular and fixed. Rather, Carillo Rowe defines differential belonging and a politics of relation as "a tactical maneuvering across resistive communities" as people choose to belong to each other across difference based upon shared conditions of struggles.[54] As Karma Chávez puts it, "The result is a coalitional subjectivity that provides the agency to resist in ways not bound by fixed identities or subjectivities as one learns to politicize her/his belongings and adopt impure stances that allow for connection between people and groups who are very different."[55]

White supremacy and scarcity in the attention economy inhibited differential belonging: Hongkongers understood that unless they had the support and attention of powerful white political leaders and prominent Euroamerican media outlets, the world would quickly lose interest in our struggles. Seen this way, the BLM movement became less of a potential ally, but more of a competitor that threatened to take the public's attention away. I thought of Vinson Cunningham's powerful reflection on solidarity across difference: "We are always joined in our sufferings, often by somebody we can't see through

the darkness. We speak of solidarity precisely because the empathetic act of analogy is a way of acknowledging this complexity, and of training our ethical senses, again and again, to widen the circle of our concern."[56] As long as we are more concerned with rendering ourselves legible to powerful state actors than with demonstrating our solidarity for each other across movements, we will not be able to cultivate sustainable coalitions for a world that is drastically different from the current one we inhabit. This understanding, however, was not easy to deliver to mainstream local Hongkongers. My friends and family in Hong Kong repeatedly told me how desperate and exhausted they were of new rounds of mass arrests and crackdown. Given the emotional immediacy of the local struggle in Hong Kong, building solidarity with another marginalized group abroad seemed unaffordable at best, and pointless and silly at worst.

Encouragingly, I witnessed the praxis of coalitional subjectivity repeatedly as I became more engaged in transnational organizing between Hongkongers and activists from the US and other countries. Differential belonging, however, is not limited to diasporic subjects—rather, it can be cultivated by what feminist María Lugones calls "'world'-travelling" across racial, national, and cultural boundaries.[57] Locally in Hong Kong, despite the threat of the NSL and pandemic social distancing policies, the League of Social Democrats organized several dozen protesters to rally outside of the US Consulate in support of BLM.[58] In June 2020 Lausan, a transnational Hong Kong leftist collective, organized an exchange between two local Hong Kong organizers and two BLM activists based respectively in New York and North Carolina.[59] In it, local Hong Kong leftist and researcher Tony Wong acknowledged the right-wing element in the Hong Kong movement. In addition to discussing how Hongkongers were swayed by right-wing mis/disinformation surrounding the BLM protests, Tony also explained that many Hongkongers subscribed to respectability politics when interpreting protests in the US: they believed that any escalation by protesters was uncalled for as, unlike Hong Kong, the US is a fully democratic country with sufficient checks-and-balances.[60] Tony made clear that while leftist media outlets were comparatively weak in the local Hong Kong discursive sphere, he and other Hong Kong activists stood in solidarity with Black activists in the US. Rather than trying to obscure the less savory elements of the Hong Kong movement, Tony brought interconnecting issues of oppression to the forefront, making clear how easy it was for an oppressed group to buy into and perpetuate dehumanizing and harmful logics in a different context.

I often thought of Tony's talk when I gave guest lectures on the Hong Kong protest to US students and faculty members from across disciplines and in-

stitutions. On the one hand, I felt that it was important for me to amplify the voices and experiences of local Hong Kong activists whose speech and freedom to protest are severely suppressed by the NSL. But on the other hand, I could not do so without also accounting for the exclusionary and racist logics perpetuated by some of the loudest voices in the Hong Kong movement. My ethical obligation towards the Hong Kong anti-authoritarian movement was and still is interconnected with my commitment to promoting racial justice in Hong Kong, the US, and beyond. Performing this coalitional subjectivity was challenging, however, because dominant public discourse is heavily informed by binaries (a democratic US vs. an authoritarian China, unruly Black rioters vs. good principled Hong Kong protesters) that do not promote a fluid sense of allegiance and belonging across contexts. As I told the story of the 2019 Hong Kong movement to students and faculty in the US, I spoke of the ingenious tactics Hong Kong protesters had invented to circumvent the police, the mutual aid practices they engaged in to take care of each other, and I also spoke of some protesters' appeal to Trump and their conflicting attitudes towards BLM. I told these stories in a way that made clear that Hong Kong movement supporters were not a monolith but were individuals with complex lives and positionalities who, like most of US, had been socialized into oppressive norms and disempowering political beliefs. We were neither passive victims without agency, nor heroes who always rose above our own conditions of oppression.

"Our Enemy's Enemy Is Our Friend"

Hongkongers' alignment with the Trump administration did not begin in 2020. In 2019, a faction of Hong Kong protesters rallied for the US's support for the pro-democracy movement with banners and signs that read, "President Trump, Please Make Hong Kong Great Again" and "President Trump, Please Liberate Hong Kong."[61] While some Hongkongers were genuinely drawn to Trump's right-wing politics, such as his stance against LGBTQ rights and immigration, many Hongkongers revealed that they were supporting Trump for strategic reasons: while they understood that Trump held many problematic political views, they believed the Trump administration to be the only political actor powerful enough to support the Hong Kong movement against the Chinese regime.[62] As a pro-Trump Hongkonger put it, "Desperate times, desperate measures. We don't have a choice."[63] A politics driven by desperation was dangerous. as it drove movement supporters to focus. on could most likely yield immediate results. The binary framework "Our enemy's enemy is our friend" was frequently invoked by Hong Kong Trump supporters

to explain why they rallied behind Trump. Desperation and a sense of powerlessness in the face of oppression might foreclose the mental and emotional space for people to engage in a more critical analysis of power and strategies that would prompt the US to examine alternative strategies and coalition-building outside of the state-centric geopolitical framework that ultimately centered the interests of powerful state governments and political leaders. As journalist Mary Hui asked: "How does a movement fighting for democracy square its support for a leader who's actively trying to dismantle it? How does a movement resisting authoritarian rule justify advocating for a political figure with deeply authoritarian instincts?"

I, along with many diasporic Hong Kong leftists and some local Hongkongers, found this trend concerning. Interpreting US news from my vantage point, I did not see Trump and right-wing politicians who run on a "tough on China" platform as allies to the Hong Kong movement. Rather, it was a self-interested political strategy to rally voters' support domestically. Indeed, when the US Senate was poised to pass a bill that would give Hongkongers temporary protective status, Ted Cruz—one of the most vocal supporters of the Hong Kong movement—objected, citing the risk of Chinese espionage and the democrats' ineptitude in countering China.[64] Strategy aside, as an Asian woman and immigrant in the US, I had felt deeply unsafe during the Trump administration, as I was bombarded with dehumanizing language and policies that placed a target on me and my communities' back. As local Hongkongers continued to rally behind Trump, I felt that my and other diasporic Hongkongers' experiences of oppressions were dismissed as a necessary sacrifice. Amidst the movement's ethos of internal coherence, what discursive space could I occupy to articulate this hurt?

Mainstream local Hongkongers and media outlets often consider leftist critiques *lei dei* (離地): beliefs and opinions that are far removed from the reality and perception of the local masses. This label was most often applied to transnational Hongkongers who hold foreign passports, with strong ties to Western countries, and "despise local cultural traditions and recognition."[65] Literally meaning "being off the ground," lei dei conjures up the image of a middle-upper class diasporic subject who would criticize the ideologies and practices of local Hong Kong activists because they have an "exit strategy" and hence little stake in the future of Hong Kong. Referencing the work of Lausan and my public writing, fellow diasporic Hong Kong academic Raymond Wang notes, "The protest movement's resentment against criticism that it considers to be from the ivory tower is emblematic of the shrinking ground for left voices."[66]

Each time I penned an article that was critical of the exclusionary elements

in the movement, the backlash from Hong Kong movement supporters was swift. Once, after I penned an op-ed that critiques the problematic alliance between the Hong Kong movement and the Trump administration, I was called a "traitor" and a "CCP dog" by both Hongkongers and white US Trump supporters on social media. While I could stomach attacks from the latter, insults hurled by fellow Hongkongers cut deep as they reinforced my insecurity and guilt about my diasporic subjectivity. Intellectually, I understood that the local Hongkongers who called me a traitor were operating on binary logics that flattened interconnected systems of power between the Trump and Xi administrations. Emotionally, however, it was a strong blow as I questioned my identity and sense of belonging as a Hongkonger: Could I still call myself a Hongkonger if those who resided in Hong Kong considered me a traitor? Mainstream Hong Kong movement discourse urged us to think that protesters who had suffered the most at the hands of the government deserved unbridled support and solidarity from others.[67] Hence, while I stood by this and other critiques, I had mounted against exclusionary elements in the movement. I couldn't help but have moments of doubt: Unlike 80 percent of local Hongkongers, I had never been tear gassed by the Hong Kong police. I was also physically out of reach by the Hong Kong government.[68] Could I speak as someone who is further removed from the throes of oppression than most local Hongkongers? By critiquing the oppressive tendencies within the movement, had I betrayed the ethos of solidarity that was upheld by many in the movement?

I was not the only diasporic Hongkonger who struggled with a deep sense of guilt. In his ethnographic research on a diasporic Hong Kong advocacy group in the US, Kennedy Chi-pan Wong finds that members often recount two narratives: the suffering of local frontline protesters, and the guiltiness of diasporic Hongkongers who remain geographically distant.[69] However, Levin Morales reminds us that a victimized identity can be weaponized to foreclose deliberative spaces: "because of historical trauma, I can speak and you cannot."[70] The Hong Kong diasporic leftists I collaborated with were deeply against a politics of guilt and suffering, especially the way it was often mobilized to encourage compliance and silence. By prioritizing the sense of guilt towards only local frontline protesters, they argued, the struggles of other Hongkongers—especially those who were marginalized and less visible in the movement—would be eclipsed. I was reluctant to relinquish guilt as my main motivator at first. While holding onto the guilt was debilitating and conflicting, it also provided comfort. As I adhered to the emotional habitus of the mainstream Hong Kong movement, I thought I could someday earn my way back into becoming a "true" Hongkonger. There was, however, no end in sight

as the guilt was ceaseless amidst the increasingly rampant government crack-downs in Hong Kong. While a politics of guilt might be a useful mobilizing tool, it was not a sustainable one. I found myself eschewing news from Hong Kong and writing less and less about it. I was both numb and burnt out. As I continued working with diasporic Hong Kong leftists who refused to stay silent or feel guilty about their diasporic subjectivity, I saw how they were able to mount acute critiques of the oppressive tendencies within the Hong Kong movement, while cultivating coalitions with marginalized activist groups in Hong Kong and abroad. Perhaps, to love and belong to a place and a movement entails not unbridled allegiance to a singular identity, but the courage to craft alternative discourse and praxis that challenges the use of the oppressor's tool to claim our liberation.

According to the dominant narrative about the Hong Kong movement, the main goal of the movement was to challenge and resist the CCP, often without questioning how capitalism, racism, misogyny, transnational neoliberalism, and histories of colonialism all played key roles in perpetuating oppression in Hong Kong. As an intersectional feminist, however, my vision for the Hong Kong movement goes beyond opposing the Chinese ruling party. Rather, I would like for the US to build to a truly democratic grassroots movement that empowers even the most marginalized people in Hong Kong to exercise self-determination. As one of the most vocal Hong Kong feminist scholar-activists Petula Ho asks: "Can't we at least promote a feminist ethic of care and acknowledge the hurts inflicted within and beyond the democracy movement, not just to women but also other marginalised sectors of society?"[71] Are radical political imaginations necessarily lei dei? In the face of desperation politics that demand immediate and intelligible output (the passage of a bill by the US Congress, or the sanctions of Chinese and Hong Kong government officials), how can we make room for politically and ethically imaginative praxis and critiques? Alex Chow, a diasporic Hong Kong activist who was formerly a leader of the Umbrella Movement, muses:

> Amid the limitations and slippages between political hopes, lived experience, collective understanding and verbal expression, it seems that our shared notion of "ground" is growing further and further apart. It sharpens our contradictions. When we talk about being "grounded" or "off the ground": who exactly is losing touch with whose ground? Those who call themselves "grounded"—is their "ground" more important than other people's grounds?[72]

Hongkongers' support for Trump reached an apex during the 2020 US presidential election as Falun Gong and Breitbart-backed news outlet *Epoch*

Times, local KOLs, and the city's leading antigovernment newspaper *Apple Daily* all started circulating pro-Trump arguments, including conspiracy theories and disinformation about Biden's involvement with China and voter fraud.[73] Directed to Hongkongers and Chinese dissident communities, these disinformation campaigns reinforced Trump's "tough on China" platform, and hence intensified many Hongkongers'—including local leftists'—support towards him. As mainstream Hong Kong movement discourse became inseparable with pro-Trump arguments, local and diasporic Hong Kong activists were often vilified and attacked vehemently online for challenging pro-Trump mis/disinformation.[74] As US–based diasporic activist Wilfred Chan writes, "The national security law has already displaced me; now the movement's turn to Trump alienates me [from the rest of the movement's supporters]."[75] In light of some Hong Kong activists' insistence on supporting Trump even after the Capitol insurrection, several diasporic Hong Kong leftists expressed on Twitter that they no longer wanted to be associated with the movement as they could not support a movement that condoned Trump, given the harm his administration had caused to marginalized and racialized groups in the US and abroad. They noted that while they would continue working towards democracy in Hong Kong, they would rather do it outside of the ideological and discursive confine of the movement, as the movement's ethos of internal solidarity was now perpetuating oppressive logics of governance.

Their tweets were met with anger and bewilderment from both local and diasporic Hongkongers who were against both Trump and the oppressive elements of the movement. Local Hongkongers especially felt betrayed and abandoned by their diasporic leftist peers as they continued to face cyberbullying and insults from Hong Kong Trump supporters. For them, the stance taken by diasporic leftists stemmed out of privilege, as local Hongkongers had little choice but to remain in the movement as repression in Hong Kong intensified. In other words, despite their shared political values and vision, the two groups' respective lived experiences and positionalities led to different affective orientations towards the movement.

Since I had personal connections to both groups, I attempted to translate and convey their respective views to each other. As I conversed with individuals from both groups, I realized that while both groups appeared to be at odds at each other, they shared similar political visions and a common injury: Both wanted to alter the course of the movement away from Far-Right elements, and both felt unheard, misunderstood, and unacknowledged by each other. Cloaked behind the respective pseudonyms on Twitter and limited by the affordances of the social media platform, they were unable or unwilling to share

the particular stories and experiences that motivated their scathing tweets. Despite displays of animosity on social media platforms, in my private conversations with individuals from each group, they both inquired about each other's wellbeing. A local Hongkonger, whose real name I still did not know, reached out to me to let me know that after taking a moment to reflect on the heated debates on Twitter, they had been trying to educate themselves about the experiences and struggles of diasporic Hongkongers: "I want to let you know that I see you." In my journal, I wrote: "I recognized that what's often missing in social media discourse is ourselves and others as persons with specific lived experiences and stories that are grounded at specific locations. We aren't just textual opinions, and arguments—we are also bodies." Under different forms of violence—including state and police violence, our bodies and psyche sustained repeated injuries. As the NSL forced Hong Kong movement supporters into the dark and rendered all vulnerable conversations potentially hazardous, we lost discursive spaces that would allow the US to recognize the different ways in which we had been harmed by the regime, and by each other.

José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification was useful in helping me navigate my relationship to the oppressive elements in mainstream Hong Kong movement discourse. For Muñoz, "Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this 'working on and against' is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance."[76] The Hong Kong context complicated Muñoz's framework as the "dominant ideology" was put forth by protesters who were facing rampant persecution for their local anti-authoritarian efforts. The Trump paradox in Hong Kong reminded me that local or everyday struggles of resistance were not always free from oppressive logics: situated amidst transnational networks of power and informed by dominant ideologies of capitalism, neoliberalism, and white supremacy, local acts of resistance can easily rearticulate oppressive beliefs and practices.

Around the same time, my mother in Hong Kong became an avid Trump supporter. She lived her whole life in Hong Kong, and was in her words, "politically apathetic" until the 2019 protest. After seeing youth protesters brutalized by the Hong Kong police, she was incensed and began consuming copious amounts of antigovernment critiques and commentaries online. During the election cycle, she consumed hours and hours of YouTube videos put forth by pro-Trump KOLs and disinformation outlets. When we talked on the phone, it was eerie to hear my mother uttering in Cantonese the same

conspiracy theories I had just heard and seen in Far-Right US media outlets. When I sent her fact-checked articles to debunk dis/misinformation, she would dismiss it as untrustworthy, and wonder if I had been brainwashed by what she saw as "fake news" outlets.

My mother and I were not the only Hongkongers whose relationship was tarnished by the US presidential election. Friends in the diasporic Hong Kong leftist circle provided crucial support, as they shared similar experiences: like my mother, some of their family members in Hong Kong had begun consuming *Epoch Times*, *Breitbart*, and other Far-Right news outlets, which concretized their belief that only Trump could defend Hong Kong and the US against China. As protests were no longer permissible in Hong Kong, consuming these sources became a substitute for some. These disinformation campaigns reduced the Hong Kong movement to simply anti-CCP and pro-Trump. By doing so, they foreclosed more expansive political imagination that would empower even the most marginalized people in Hong Kong. Citing Trump's repressive immigration policies and his inflammatory discourse against immigrants and women of color, I pleaded with mother to please see how the strongman figure she supported was actively harming people like her daughter. She responded by reiterating that it was more important to safeguard the future of Hong Kong. Supporting the Hong Kong movement had, in my mother's and many other Hongkongers' minds, became synonymous with supporting Trump. I wondered, but never dared to ask my mother if she had ever doubted my commitment for Hong Kong's anti-authoritarian movement because of my vehement resistance against Trump.

Given this tension in the Hong Kong movement, I turned to principles of transformative justice (TJ) to help me navigate how I should position myself. Activist and educator Mia Mingus defines TJ as a political framework that "seeks to respond to violence without creating more violence and/or engaging in harm reduction to lessen the violence."[77] As a community-based abolitionist framework that was first practiced by Black and Brown women, queer people of color, sex workers, and disabled people, TJ invites practitioners to focus not only on individuals and the singular incidences of violence—rather, TJ "works to connect incidences of violence to the conditions that create and perpetuate them."[78] Denouncing Hong Kong Trump supporters and seeing myself as separate from them, in other words, would only individualize the structural conditions and histories that had given rise to these oppressive beliefs and practices. While I criticized the logics of pro-Trump Hongkongers in my writing and my interviews with journalists, I understood that I too was brought up and socialized in the same set of conditions that produced this ideological paradox: supporting an authoritarian figure in the US to counter

local authoritarianism and state violence. To contextualize what had given rise to Hong Kong Trumpism, I researched and tweeted about the historical, sociopolitical, and media conditions that had caused so many Hong Kong activists to turn towards Trump at the expense of grassroots solidarity with activists from BLM and other marginalized groups in the US.

While, as a feminist rhetorician, I believed the need to connect individual behaviors and beliefs to the larger ideological structures, I worried that my contextualization in public writing would be read by other diasporic Hong Kong leftists as an apologia or "excuses" for the oppressive elements in the movement.[79] Residing in the American South, I was physically isolated from local Hongkongers and the diasporic Hong Kong community. I, hence, deeply yearned to belong fully to the diasporic Hong Kong Left community on social media and digital organizing spaces. This yearning casted doubt on whether I should denounce Hong Kong Trump supporters with harsher wording, or refrain from situating and contextualizing their beliefs. My desire to belong unequivocally to a community of practice was in tension with my commitment towards a TJ praxis that does not demonize individuals and deem them disposable. As adrienne maree brown notes, rather than dismissing someone as evil when they do not share our values and have caused harm, TJ prompts us to ask ourselves and each other "why."[80] Inquiring about the conditions that had caused such beliefs and behaviors, she argues, "makes it impossible to ignore that we might be capable of a similar transgression in similar circumstances."[81] Hence, at the end, I chose the latter. My goal was not to shame local Hongkongers, or expect them to change their worldview drastically at a time of crisis. Rather, I hoped to explain to potential allies outside of Hong Kong that the oppressive tendencies they observed in the Hong Kong movement were products of socialization and dominant ideologies; local Hongkongers were not, by default, morally defective. Heeding the teaching of TJ, I believe that as we criticize oppressive beliefs and practices in our community to promote change, we must also recognize that we are not above perpetuating harm. As brown reminds us, in TJ, "we relinquished judgment rooted in superiority. We shook off individual righteousness as a symptom of supremacy thinking. We were not better than each other."[82] Situating individual oppressive beliefs in the broader sociopolitical and historical context, hence, is crucial to hold both ourselves and each other accountable.

In a roundtable I participated on transnational feminist abolition, TJ practitioner and researcher Rachel Zellars asked: "How do we respond to the kinds of harm and violence that happen all around [the] U.S. in ways that do not further produce it, make it bigger, or agitate it?" To prevent the perpetuation of oppressive norms, TJ emphasizes a communal approach to account-

ability in which "we build relationships and communities that can hold the inevitable conflict, oppression, and difficulty that we will inevitably experience given the ongoing work of interlocking systemic oppression."[83] Since TJ is a community-based framework, Zellars and other TJ coalitional activist-scholars emphasize that strong day-to-day relationships with each other in the community is crucial to facilitating accountability.[84] Under the chilling effect of the NSL, where Hongkongers were rightfully skeptical of each other for fear that they would be turned into the national security police for any comments they made, local and diasporic Hongkongers had few opportunities to have vulnerable conversations with each other freely. Could, or how could, we enact a praxis of TJ and build trust and community when the state had forced us to distrust each other? And can we do so when spaces for collective grief and healing are foreclosed by the state?

Slippage across Contexts: "Whose Trauma and Suffering Do We Center?"

The controversies surrounding the presidential election coincided with the pandemic and the rise of anti-Asian violence in the United States. In 2020, as Trump repeatedly deployed racist language such as "kung flu" to describe the pandemic, anti-Asian violence increased significantly. While the Asian American community denounced Trump's language as it reified the racial stereotype of Asians/Asian Americans as disease factors, many pro-democracy local Hongkongers insisted on calling COVID-19 the "Wuhan Virus" as a way to hold the Chinese government accountable for silencing whistleblowers, and for establishing a staunch distinction between Hong Kong and mainland China.[85] As the ethnic and racial majority in the city, Han Chinese Hongkongers who grew up in the city had not experienced racialization and racism the way Hong Kong and Chinese Americans had in the West. Local Hongkongers were not the only ones who preferred calling the pandemic "Wuhan Virus": many diasporic Hong Kong advocacy groups in the US were also comfortable with using the term as well; attempting to bridge the gap, some settled on the "CCP virus" instead. For others, including myself, who were made targets of anti-Asian violence in the West, the insistence on labeling COVID a Chinese virus, despite the rise of racial violence, was a hurtful and harmful act. In an interview with *Hong Kong Free Press*, a local pro-democracy activist emphasized the need to double-down on calling COVID-19 a Chinese virus after the Chinese government publicly denounced this label. He dismissed the concern of anti-Asian violence abroad, claiming that calling COVID-19 the "Chinese virus" was just "a drop in an ocean of thousands."[86] While this ac-

tivist's view did not represent all local Hongkongers, it was not difficult to see how the pandemic had become a lightning rod in local and diasporic Hong Kong social media and organizing spaces.

This divide dampened the coalition potential between diasporic and local Hong Kong activists as they did not always agree on whether calling COVID-19 the "CCP virus" or "China virus" was doing more harm than good. Local Hong Kong activists, including some who share leftist values, insisted on referring to the virus as a Chinese virus, as they saw anti-China discourse during the pandemic as a key opportunity to rally international support against the CCP. Diasporic Hong Kong activists, on the other hand, understood from their minoritized lived experience that—given US imperialism, xenophobia, and racism—the Asian/American community would become collateral damage in this discursive project.[87] As the ethnic and racial majority, mainstream Hongkongers did not share the same concern. While local Hong Kong activists understood that calling COVID-19 the "China Virus" could harm their diasporic peers and other Asian/Americans, from their vantage point, it was important to resist the Chinese government at all costs, even if it meant stoking anti-Asian racism elsewhere. In a roundtable conversation I facilitated with diasporic Hong Kong leftists from different positionalities, panelist Vince asked us to consider in mainstream movement discourse, whose trauma and oppression was centered, and whose was sidelined or erased. He opined:

"As someone who has experienced direct threats [in North America] based on my Chinese identity, I have a very visceral understanding of the consequences of Trumpism. Living in communities where this is an issue, you quickly understand the fear that Trumpism is causing and white supremacy is causing right in your community. . . . But we have to understand and make room for the fact that sometimes these positionalities (between local and diaspora) will actually be different and vice versa. We have to understand those mutual triggers if we're to communicate."[88]

Vince articulated the need for coalitional subjectivity as the Hong Kong movement had always impacted people both locally and transnationally. As Kennedy Wong, a sociologist who studies Hong Kong diasporic politics, notes: "Conflicts happen when people use words without addressing the multiple meanings of them, and without thinking through how a single word could bring harm to one community while symbolizing a fight of another."[89] If we saw the fights against Chinese authoritarianism and Sinophobic racism and white supremacy as hierarchical rather than interconnected, we would be trapped in a competitive framework that saw each other as potential antagonists rather than co-strugglers.

As Sinophobia and anti-Asian violence rose in the United States, I became hyperaware that, when speaking and writing in support of the Hong Kong movement to a US audience, my words could be used to fuel existing racism against Chinese people. Researchers of Chinese nationalism and culture have pointed out that a key rhetorical strategy for the Chinese Communist Party "is to conflate the Party with the nation" so that the Party comes to stand in for all Chinese people; the discourse of Chinese state nationalism also encompasses not only Chinese citizens, but people who are of Chinese descent more broadly.[90] Sinophobia and racism in the US further cements this conflation between the ruling regime and Chinese people. During the pandemic, I presented a lecture on the Hong Kong movement and the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Afterwards, a white student exclaimed: "The Chinese government is so evil!" While the student did not make any racist remarks about Chinese people writ large, I could not help but wonder if my lecture had reinforced Sinophobic sentiments in them. In the backdrop of Sinophobic racism, any teaching about Chinese authoritarianism must be paired with careful disentanglement between the CCP and the people.

At the same time, as the US Left became more critical of bipartisan "China bashing," I observed conflations between rightful criticisms of the Chinese Communist Party with racist Sinophobia.[91] I, along with the diasporic Hong Kong leftists I worked with, understood that the conflation between anti-Asian racism and criticisms against the CCP could harm communities that were oppressed by the Chinese government and were actively resisting authoritarian rule.[92] After the Atlanta shooting which killed six Asian women, I spoke at a solidarity rally in Lexington, KY. I glanced at the crowd and saw a few community members holding up signs that said, "Stop China Bashing." I flinched. In this context, these signs suggested that criticisms against China contributed to deadly violence against Asian women in the US. I wondered what the sign holders thought of me as I introduced myself as a diasporic Hong Kong activist who opposed Chinese authoritarianism, and was also a target of anti-Asian racism and misogyny in the US. As Wong argued, "If one simply sees all 'China-bashing' people in the world as racists, then, unfortunately, a significant population of Hongkongers, Taiwanese, Uyghurs, and many others would be labeled as racists."[93] Wong's remark came to bear in March 2021 when activists at a Uyghur human rights protest were met with hostility by attendees of a Stop Asian Hate Rally in Washington, D.C. During the Uyghur rights parade organized by the Uyghur American Association, participants displayed messages such as "Stop Uyghur Genocide" and "Hold China Accountable"; some yelled "Fuck China!" In return, protesters at the Stop Asian Hate Rally accused them of being racist for bashing the Chinese

government.[94] This incident points to the complexity of identifying our shared struggles amidst discursive slippages and conflations. Transnational rhetoricians have reminded the US that as language travels across contexts, it is mobilized by different stakeholders who imbue the same set of discourse with different connotations and ideologies.[95] As local grassroots movements become inevitably transnational, how could we more effectively navigate interconnected discursive terrains without silencing ourselves, and without causing more harms to other marginalized communities?

EXPANDING CIRCLES OF CONCERN

After the Atlanta shooting, my friend Grace Ting gave a lecture to her students in Hong Kong on the necessary yet difficult work of transnational solidarity. In it, she asked:

> Why should students in Hong Kong care about anything we read and discuss that is not "about" Hong Kong? Thinking and feeling in terms of solidarity is work. Sometimes we are asked to do it when dealing with our own grief in a society that refuses to acknowledge our injury. . . . How do we learn to be connected in better, more life-giving ways? How will you respond to this question, not in general terms of how we should care, but in specific detail about the obstacles, labor, grief, love, and agency experienced through acts of caring?[96]

As the NSL forecloses spaces for local Hongkongers to mourn, grief, and rage collectively, mainstream international discourse depicts Hong Kong as a city that is either dead or dying. Amidst this backdrop, I found myself questioning how I understood solidarity in translocal contexts: Were local Hong Kong protesters right to demand that their struggles always be centered—even at the expense of transnational solidarity with activists from other movements—because they were most impacted by China's authoritarian rule? I understood that the impulse to self-center was based out of the well-founded fear that our movement would be completely silenced and forgotten. However, as Vince and others observed, mainstream movement discourse in Hong Kong centered only the experiences of mainstream Hongkongers, while continuing to sideline marginalized communities in Hong Kong, such as Southeast Asian migrant women, South Asian ethnic minorities, and poor mainland Chinese immigrants, who face multiple systems of oppressions.[97]

As systems of oppression intersect in both local and transnational contexts, the attempt to rank whose struggle deserves the most attention is a futile and unproductive one. Is it worse to live under an authoritarian regime in

Hong Kong as an ethnic majority, or live as a target of racial violence in the US while also being under the long shadow of the NSL? Is it worse to live as a Hongkonger or as a racialized and marginalized subject in the West as both battle state violence and police brutality, albeit in different forms? I have participated in conversations in which Hongkongers from different positionalities grappled with these questions to no avail. Instead of cultivating coalitional subjectivity, these questions reified the assumption that oppression exists on a linear hierarchy. At the end, interlocutors often left feeling unacknowledged and unseen. Rather than pitting our suffering and struggles against each other as if there must be a definite "winner," how can we understand our experience in relation to others'? Can we conceptualize transnational oppressions as intersecting circles with multiple centers, rather than a linear scale where there can only be one middle point? What stories would we tell then? What new possibilities for organizing and belonging would arise? In a transnational migrant justice panel I facilitated not long ago, US–based diasporic Hong Kong activist Nathan Cheung elucidated the need to tell stories that were intersectional, stories that moved beyond single-identity politics.[98] While relentless state violence and silencing may have made us cynical, self-oriented, and distrustful of others, my vision is for us to see our circle of concern as always already intersecting with others so that we can, as philosopher Shannon Sullivan posits, "stretch the self toward and into other people."[99] As struggles against state violence and authoritarianism becomes global, this may be the only way for US to build a sustainable movement against intersecting forms of power.

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