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**An H-Diplo Book Review Essay**

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**Priscilla Roberts and Odd Arne Westad. *China, Hong Kong, and the Long 1970s*.** London: Palgrave Macmillan 2017. ISBN: 978-3-319-51249-5 (hardcover, \$109.00).

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From Taiwan to Hong Kong and Macao; from Japan, Korea and Southeast Asian countries to Australia and New Zealand; from United States to Europe and Africa, the rapid expansion of China's influences in recent years has become increasingly noticeable across different countries and regions.<sup>1</sup> Four decades after the beginning of the 'Reform and Opening-up' of 1978, it goes without saying that China's economic, military, and political powers have strengthened tremendously. China has not only won major power status but it has rapidly exerted its influences across borders, shaping not only international politics but also the domestic politics of many countries and regions. China's expanding influence has already encountered resistance, fear, and suspicion in different countries and regions such as Australia, New Zealand, Southeast Asia, and South Asia,<sup>2</sup> most importantly prompting the reaction of the United States to defend its world-leading superpower status.<sup>3</sup> With a new cold war between China and the United States on the horizon, Priscilla Roberts's and Odd Arne Westad's edited volume *China, Hong Kong, and the Long 1970s* has provided us with a unique global-historical perspective to understand and interpret the rise of China dating back to the 1970s.

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<sup>1</sup> Katie Hunt, "China's New World Order," *CNN*, 12 May 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2017/05/world/chinas-new-world-order>, accessed 17 February 2018; James Kynge, Lucy Hornby, and Jamil Anderlini, "Inside China's Secret 'Magic Weapon' for Worldwide Influence," *Financial Times*, 26 October 26, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/fb2b3934-b004-11e7-beba-5521c713abf4>, accessed 17 February 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Perlez, "Xi Jinping Pushes China's Rise Despite Friction and Fear," *New York Times*, 22 October 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/22/world/asia/china-xi-jinping-global-power.html>, accessed 22 July 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Porter, "China Waging New 'Cold War' to Topple U.S. as World's Leading Superpower, Says CIA Official," *Newsweek*, 22 July 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/china-waging-new-cold-war-topple-us-worlds-leading-superpower-says-cia-1036226>, accessed: 22 July 2018.

In this volume Roberts and Westad have brought together an international team of scholars and researchers examining the various decisions made by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime in the 1970s in re-approaching the non-Communist world, with special attention devoted to the role of Hong Kong during this historical process. Roberts begins the book with a powerful introduction that skillfully reconstructs the story of China's re-engagement with the West throughout the 1970s, including its significant presence at the United Nations, its ambitious assistance programme to Afro-Asian countries, its diplomatic normalization with the United States, and, most importantly, its adoption of the Reform and Opening-up Policy in 1978. Roberts particularly points out that Deng Xiaoping's decision to embrace capitalism without accepting democracy in the late 1970s laid the foundation for the prevalence of the 'China Model' in the twenty-first century (1-30).

The main body of the book consists of twelve chapters discussing China's re-engagement with the world on different dimensions: Sergey Radchenko traces the role of the Soviet Union in shaping Chinese policies, in particular the significance of the 1969 Sino-Soviet border clashes in impelling Chinese leaders to seek to improve relations with the West. Joshua Eisenman examines the evolving economic challenges facing rural China during the 1970s and their implications for the industrialization in the 1980s, while Jon Wilson analyzes the interaction between China, Britain and newly independent Southeast Asian states against the backdrop of disintegration of the British Empire. Xu Guoqi traces Beijing's creative and successful use of sport diplomacy in the process of re-positioning itself in the international politics, and Xun Zhou analyzes the importance of health and medicine in Beijing's engagement with the First and Third Worlds in the 1970s

Shu Guang Zhang interprets China's economic statecraft in the 1970s as making the best use of its economic aid in accomplishing political and strategic goals including promoting China's 'opening up' abroad and at home in the immediate post-Mao era. Federico Pachetti focuses on the economic dimension of Sino-American relations in the 1970s with emphasis to the role of United States' academics, economists, and business-community members in advocating the economic modernization of China; Nicholas Thomas explores Sino-Australian Relations in the 1970s by tracing the shifting Australian foreign and domestic attitudes to China. Valeria Zanier and Roberto Peruzzi examine the implications of the 1967 Hong Kong riots on the Hong Kong-British-PRC triangular relationship; Chi-kwan Mark investigates the de-colonialization of Hong Kong against the backdrop of closer economic ties between China and Hong Kong and the upcoming expiry of the lease on the New Territories, while John D. Wong traces the shifting public attitudes in Hong Kong toward these Vietnamese boat people amidst Cold War realignments and the city's future; Priscilla Roberts traces the role of quasi-private institutions in the United States and Britain in reintegrating China into the international system during the 1970s with emphasis on the significance of think-tanks, philanthropic foundations, and the like. The conclusion by Odd Arne Westad highlights the potential, as is clear from the chapters of the book, of "China and the long 1970s" as an important field of research.

I believe that the most important theoretical contribution of this edited volume is the development of a global-historical perspective for interpreting today's China in the context of the long 1970s. For China, the long 1970s was not just a period of 'transition' but a period of 'transformation' by which the CCP regime moved away from orthodox communism toward a new governing model of concurrently combining both market reforms (as officially enshrined in the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> CCP Central Committee) and authoritarian rule (as officially summarized by Deng Xiaoping as the 'Four Cardinal Principles' in 1979). As correctly pointed out by Roberts, Deng Xiaoping's "legacy lived on in what in 2004 was known as the 'Beijing Consensus' or 'China Model,' an outlook that favored state-directed capitalism and rejected Western-

style democracy” (26). Today when Western powers, particularly the United States, struggle in dealing with an economically powerful but politically authoritarian China, they should find this book to be an important reference point, as many of the international and domestic strategies of the current CCP regime are actually built upon the “policy choices that China had made during the long 1970s” (26).

As a Hong Kong Studies scholar, I am particularly interested in those chapters that specifically touch on the strategic role of Hong Kong in fostering China’s historical re-engagement with the non-Communist world in the 1970s. As demonstrated in this volume, in the long 1970s when CCP made the historical decision to re-engage with the non-Communist world, Hong Kong was unquestionably at the forefront of China’s opening-up process, serving as the strategic reservoir of capital, global networks, business knowledge, and professional talent. In 1997, when Britain handed-over Hong Kong’s sovereignty to China, many Western observers optimistically predicted that Hong Kong, under the ‘One Country Two systems’ Model, was going to liberalize China and help it integrate with the International (Western) system.<sup>4</sup> Four decades after the long 1970s, the situation has changed quite significantly, and ironically the reverse has occurred. While Hong Kong is still strategically significant to the CCP regime given its role as an international financial center, its overall importance to China has been decreased. Also, Hong Kong has not liberalized China as Western optimists had predicted, but China is increasingly imposing its authoritarian controls over Hong Kong.<sup>5</sup> Against this backdrop, in recent years Hong Kong’s position has changed from being at the “forefront of China’s reform and opening-up process” to the “forefront of resisting China’s expanding influences,” as demonstrated in the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the recent peripheral nationalist movements.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, Roberts and Westad’s edited volume tells us that the discussion of Hong Kong’s political future should be better comprehended in the historical context of the long 1970s when China decided to make the best use of Hong Kong’s status to facilitate its re-engagement with the world but insisted on rejecting Western-style democracy.

All in all, this book does a valuable job in highlighting the theoretical importance of researching and reading China through “the long 1970s.” It is essential reading for all scholars and researchers with an interest in China Studies and Hong Kong Studies, offering significant insights about China’s rise and its expanding influences around the world in recent years.

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<sup>4</sup> Keith B. Richburg, “Hong Kong was supposed to liberalize China. How did the opposite happen?” *The Washington Post*, 23 June 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/hong-kong-was-supposed-to-liberalize-china-how-did-the-opposite-happen/2017/06/23/ef356eba-5762-11e7-a204-ad706461fa4f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/hong-kong-was-supposed-to-liberalize-china-how-did-the-opposite-happen/2017/06/23/ef356eba-5762-11e7-a204-ad706461fa4f_story.html), accessed 17 February 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Brian C.H. Fong, “In-between Liberal Authoritarianism and Electoral Authoritarianism: Hong Kong’s Democratization under Chinese Sovereignty, 1997-2016,” *Democratization* 24:4 (2016): 724-750.

<sup>6</sup> Brian C.H. Fong, “One Country, Two Nationalisms: Center-Periphery Relations Between Mainland China and Hong Kong, 1997-2016,” *Modern China* 43:5 (2017): 523-556.

international peer-reviewed journals such as *China Quarterly*, *Modern China*, *Asian Survey*, *Democratization*, and *International Review of Administrative Sciences*.

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