

HELEN HOK-SZE LEUNG. *Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008. 149 pp. US\$ 24.95, paper.

Hong Kong's cultural identity has attracted a great deal of academic discussion as the city goes through the historical transition from British colonial rule to the jurisdiction of the People's Republic of China. Hong Kong's cultural identity and queer sexuality share some interesting similarities, as the Hong Kong-born, Canada-based queer scholar Helen Hok-Sze Leung argues in her monograph *Undercurrents*. Beneath the normative representations of nationality, belonging, gender and sexuality lie the undercurrents – that is, those that are non-normative, less manifest, marginal and transient. The study of queer sexuality in Hong Kong offers a different perspective to understand the cultural identity of Hong Kong. Conversely, the city's postcolonial condition, understood as the continuing experience of being colonised after the demise of British colonialism, also provides its queer culture with a particular political significance. More importantly, identification and belonging in Hong Kong bespeak the politics of love in a postcolonial context: love the city but not in the same way as what is described in the Hong Kong government's official slogan "love the country, love Hong Kong". This politics of love, as such, opens up spaces for alternative expressions of identity, belonging and sites of everyday resistance.

Key to understanding the argument of the book is its title *Undercurrents*, which is borrowed from a song of the same title by Faye Wong. The lyrics of the song

dramatise the inter-connections of history, city space and the self; it also expresses a mixed feeling of love, hope, despair and “personal anxiety with the political uncertainty of the city’s postcolonial transition” (p. 5). As a diasporic queer scholar who cherishes fond memories of her “queer” family and the “queer” city where she spent her childhood, Leung weaves beautifully together her personal history, the history of Hong Kong’s queer community, and the history of Hong Kong in order to demonstrate her “queer” feelings about the postcolonial city and the city’s “queerness” in transnational geopolitics.

The book has five chapters, respectively dealing with the cinematic representation of Hong Kong’s queer and postcolonial space (Chapter 1), female same-sex intimacy in modern Chinese literature and contemporary Hong Kong cinema (Chapter 2), transgenderism in Hong Kong films and Hong Kong society (Chapter 3), queer pop icon Leslie Cheung’s career (Chapter 4), and “do-it-yourself” projects of queer writings by Hong Kong’s queer activists (Chapter 5). Together they unfold a picture of postcolonial Hong Kong with myriad queer possibilities that would otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Leung’s work contributes to the growing body of work under the rubric of Asian Queer Studies, which endeavours to “decolonise” queer studies by focusing on the multiple expressions of gender, sexuality and intimacy that do not fit into Euro-American norms. Her “queer” archive includes film, literature, autobiographic writing, public cultural events, lyrics of popular songs, and personal memories, all of which combine to shape the contour of Hong Kong’s queer culture and the city’s postcolonial landscape.

Leung’s approach is also both distinctively postcolonial and queer. Besides drawing on theories and debates in Anglophone academia, she engages with debates in Hong Kong’s Chinese-language sphere, and cites works published in Chinese. Personal experiences, memories, family photographs and anecdotes are utilised to make theoretical provocations. For example, Leung begins the book with the discussion of an old photo of her late grandfather crossdressing for a Cantonese Opera performance, thus raising the issue of the importance of indigenous queer knowledge and practices. The photo and the story not only add a personal and emotional touch to the book, but challenge what constitutes legitimate knowledge and research data in academia. Besides, the poetic language and affective tone used in the book collapse the boundary between the literary genre and the academic genre. As Leung remarks, queer politics should also involve challenging the hegemony of Eurocentric modes of academic knowledge production, and bringing to the fore other forms of knowledge and practices, “a kind of undercurrent in the global critical scene” (p. 6).

Listed as the first book in the ‘Queer Asia’ series published by Hong Kong University Press, *Undercurrents* is written with both international and local readers in mind. Despite its modest length (120 pages), the theoretical sophistication of the book may not make it an easy read for those who are not familiar with queer theory. However, the author’s poetic language, emotional vigour, and the interesting cases, stories and examples included, most of which come from Hong Kong’s popular culture, make the book quite reader-friendly. This book should become an indispensable collection for those who are interested in queer culture and Hong

Kong's cultural identity. It marks one of the best works to critically engage with queer theory in an Asian context, and sets a standard for the field of Asian Queer Studies.

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