H-Diplo Roundtable XXIII-29 on Hamilton. Made in Hong Kong: Transpacific Networks and a New History of Globalization

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H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXIII-29


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Contents

Introduction by John M. Carroll, The University of Hong Kong

Review by Chi-kwan Mark, Royal Holloway, University of London

Review by Pete Millwood, University of Hong Kong

Review by Kazushi Minami, Osaka University

Review by Meredith Oyen, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Response by Peter E. Hamilton, Lingnan University, Hong Kong

Introduction by John M. Carroll, The University of Hong Kong

At the heart of Made in Hong Kong are human networks. Peter Hamilton shows how a group of American-educated Hong Kong elites he calls “kuashang” (straddling merchants) led Hong Kong’s economic and educational development from the 1950s through the 1970s, and then China’s reintegration into the global economy from the early 1970s. This was a cohort of “mobile, pragmatic, and adaptive” (3) elites that included bankers, industrialists, executives, academics, and Nationalist
technocrats. Most notable about them is how much they straddled: among others, the Nationalist-Communist transition in the late 1940s and early 1950s; the move from the mainland to Hong Kong during the same period; and Sino-American relations and interactions. The common denominator
here? American social capital, acquired during their studies at American universities.

Hamilton not only situates tiny Hong Kong at the center of the postwar expansion of global capitalism, his notion of *kuashang* also enables him to straddle (pardon the pun) several different fields, including Chinese history, Hong Kong history, American and (to a lesser extent) British imperial history, and both migration and business history. He starts his book with a point that has confounded many scholars who work on the region: despite all the talk of the “Hong Kong miracle,” historians have paid little attention to the city’s economic transformation. Instead, they speak in generalizations, abstractions, and cliches – free trade, hard work and resilience, and the almost accidental nature of Hong Kong’s modern history. As Hamilton shows, none of these do justice to Hong Kong as a place in its own right, though one that both shaped and was shaped by other places. Hamilton illustrates this with numerous examples of the many people involved – living, breathing humans, some of whom are still living and breathing.

All four reviewers stress the quality and significance of *Made in Hong Kong*. For Pete Millwood, this “rich account of the construction of modern Hong Kong” is “lucidly written in lively prose and tells an absorbing story.” Kazushi Minami writes that *Made in Hong Kong* is “a solidly-researched, provocatively-argued study, and Hamilton deserves much praise for his achievement.” Meredith Oyen calls it “an extraordinary book,” adding how “the personal stories and sense of narrative make it accessible even to those who might panic a little at the words ‘economic history’.” Chi-kwan Mark describes the book as “pathbreaking” and “a must-read” – “original, thought provoking, and beautifully written.” As Mark puts it, this is “international history at its best.”

Much of the discussion in these reviews revolves around two terms Hamilton coined: *kuashang* and “informal decolonization,” linked by the decline and then rise of China, and the waning of British imperialism alongside American expansion. Mark finds the notion of *kuashang* “innovative and interesting” but “elusive at times,” especially in terms of the *kuashang*’s influence on Hong Kong politics, which he suggests Hamilton has overstated. Oyen agrees that Hamilton’s *kuashang* are “singular figures in an already unique place.” Yet she also notes how this was neither the first nor the only time Chinese people used American social capital to develop their families’ businesses: something similar happened in late-Qing and republican China and then on Taiwan after 1949. (I might add here that Chinese people in Hong Kong and Singapore, for example, had been straddling empires well before Hamilton’s *kuashang* entered the picture). Even more provocatively (and convincingly, at least in my opinion), Oyen asks whether these *kuashang* strategies could better explain the “economic miracles” of “all or more of the four little tigers” than “Confucian values” do.

As for decolonization, Mark suggests that while offering “brilliant accounts of the family and business history of individual *kuashang*,” *Made in Hong Kong* may overstate how these elites contributed to what Hamilton calls “the shift from British to American hegemony.” By not defining “decolonization” or engaging existing scholarship on the British Empire, Mark argues, Hamilton suggests that the British lost their dominance of Hong Kong’s economy after the war as colonial officials “quietly ceded day-to-day decisions to the well-connected *kuashang*.” For Millwood, Hamilton’s book demonstrates how Hong Kong’s post-war history was defined at least as much by the colony’s “deep transpacific...
ties” (that is, to the United States) as by its relationship with Britain. But even if “invited American influence” showed Hong Kong people that there were other “loci” than London, Millwood asks, “did it bring about decolonisation?”

Related to the theme of decolonization is that of American empire. Minami wonders whether the United States was an empire, noting how Hamilton seems to view “empire” as “connections” through which countries around the world gravitated to U.S. “power.” Especially pertinent here, Millwood observes, the resumption of Chinese sovereignty in 1997 had “little or nothing” to do with American (let alone local Chinese) influence in Hong Kong. On the contrary, the kuashang were as worried as other Hong Kong people about the imminent transition. “If we employ Hamilton’s language,” Millwood writes, “it seems the processes of informal and formal decolonisation ran in parallel, rather than being causally related.” Both Mark and Millwood suggest that more engagement with scholarship on the British Empire would have been useful. Millwood notes, for example, how the British often allowed both social and political structures that operated in parallel to those of their own.

For Hamilton, these terms emphasize how transpacific strategies “overlapped and co-existed with formal British rule.” He explains in his response how “informal decolonization” refers not so much to a transfer of power from Britain to the United States but to “elite U.S.-connected actors.” Examining a range of U.S. “imperial projects” in Hong Kong, rather than an American “formal empire,” thus enables us to move beyond formal diplomacy and politics to explore the “extensive but overlooked imprint of such projects throughout Hong Kong society.” As Hong Kong moves further into its postcolonial history, it is worth remembering that such straddling strategies are still a work in progress. For Hong Kong now has other, complementary but sometimes competing, groups of kuashang: those coming in recent years from the mainland. How will these strategies continue to overlap and coexist, though now with formal Chinese rule?

Participants:

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**Chi-kwan Mark** is Senior Lecturer in International History at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is the author of *The Everyday Cold War: Britain and China, 1950-1972* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), *China and the World since 1945: An International History* (London: Routledge,
2012), and *Hong Kong and the Cold War: Anglo-American Relations 1949-1957* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), as well as the co-editor of the four-volume *Critical Readings on the Modern History of Hong Kong* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

**Pete Millwood** is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Society of Fellows in the Humanities at the University of Hong Kong. He researches the history of the Chinese world’s international and transnational relations, particularly with the United States. After receiving his D.Phil. degree in History from St Antony’s College, Oxford, Pete held postdoctoral fellowships at Tsinghua and Oxford universities and the London School of Economics. His work has been published in *Diplomatic History* and the *Journal of Contemporary History* and his first book, on cultural and scientific exchanges in the Sino-American rapprochement of the 1970s, is under contract with Cambridge University Press.

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**Meredith Oyen** is an associate professor of history and director of the Asian Studies Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Oyen has received fellowships from NSEP Boren, Fulbright, and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, in addition to research funding from the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. Oyen has published articles in *Diplomatic History*, the *Journal of Cold War Studies, Modern Asian Studies*, and the *Journal of American Ethnic History*. Her first book, *The Diplomacy of Migration: Transnational Lives and the Making of U.S.-Chinese Relations in the Cold War*, was published in 2015 by Cornell University Press.

**Review by Chi-kwan Mark, Royal Holloway, University of London**

Peter Hamilton’s *Made in Hong Kong* is an original, thought provoking, and beautifully written book. Focusing on a group of American-educated Hong Kong elites whom he called *kuashang* (or “straddling merchants,” 3), it examines how these émigré industrialists, bankers, executives, and academics contributed to Hong Kong’s economic takeover and higher education between the 1950s and the 1970s, and to China’s integration into the global economy since the early 1970s. The key to their successes was American social capital, which the *kuashang* had accumulated during their studies at U.S. colleges and then utilized in the pursuit of their business and educational interests. By exploring the transpacific networks and agency of *kuashang*, Hamilton aims to put Hong Kong at the center of global history, given the tiny British colony’s status as a key node in post-1945 capitalist globalization.

The book is divided into two main parts. Following an introduction that outlines the concept of *kuashang* and the main arguments, chapter 1 provides a brief history of Chinese emigration, especially the influx of Shanghainese and Cantonese to Hong Kong during the communist transition. Chapters 2 to 4 focuses on the role of *kuashang* in the educational and social development of Hong Kong, particularly its higher education. The U.S. government funneled, through the “state-private networks,” resources into American and international missionary organizations in Hong Kong (72).
Local elite Christians, in turn, served as “skilled agents of grassroots cultural diplomacy” (72) for Washington. American funding was crucial to the economic survival of the three “refugee colleges” – the Chung Chi College, the New Asia College, and the United College (101). The founding of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (which incorporated the three colleges) in 1963 demonstrated the “decisive” role of *kuashang* in Hong Kong’s higher education (129). As the first vice-chancellor of the university, American-educated Li Choh-ming sought to build a “transpacific university” by importing U.S. academic systems, employing mainly U.S.-based scholars, and providing staff and students with opportunities in transpacific circulations. By threatening Commonwealth academic systems (the British-modeled University of Hong Kong being the only degree-granting institution until 1963) and redirecting Hong Kong students toward the United States (which made Hong Kong into the world’s largest sender of foreign students to America in the 1970s), Li’s Chinese University exemplified Hong Kong’s “transition from British to American hegemony” and “significantly accelerated Hong Kong’s ongoing informal decolonization” (129).

In Chapters 5 to 8, the author turns to the *kuashang*’s contributions to Hong Kong’s export-oriented industrialization since the 1950s and to China’s embrace of global capitalism from the early 1970s. With American social capital, Tang Pingyuan, the founder of South Sea Textiles, transformed his company into the largest textile manufacturer in Hong Kong by 1970, whereas Shen Hsi-jui, as the first ethnically Chinese manager of the Hongkong Bank, became a leading broker of industrial lending to *kuashang* industrialists. In view of the growth of Anglo-American protectionism since the early 1960s and the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system in the 1970s, the *kuashang* resorted to direct outside investment and diversification of production. Tang took South Sea Textiles public in 1964, bringing in British and Japanese capital. After the resumption of Sino-U.S. trade in 1971, the *kuashang* predicted and prepared for reforms in China. The American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong played an important role in this regard, and such *kuashang* as Gordon Wu Ying-sheung of Hopewell Construction and Victor Fung of the trading firm Li & Fung were eager to join the chamber. With the adoption of a policy of reform and opening by Deng Xiaoping, China’s paramount leader, in 1979, the prospects for transpacific circulation looked brighter than ever. Many *kuashang* industrialists moved their operations to the mainland, thereby linking cheap Chinese labor with the American market. The turning point in the evolution of *kuashang* strategies, according to Hamilton, occurred in June 1984, when Deng received a delegation of Hong Kong executives led by Jack Chi-chien Tang (who ran South Sea Textiles following his father’s death). Accordingly, Deng reached a “gentleman’s agreement” with *kuashang* elites by promising “one country, two systems” for post-handover Hong Kong in order to secure their contribution to China’s development. From “building transpacific networks,” the *kuashang* now focused on “repositioning Hong Kong as the linchpin between U.S. and PRC systems” (251-252).

There is much to admire in *Made in Hong Kong*. For one, the book provides the first comprehensive account of U.S.-Hong Kong relations through the lens of individual Hong Kong elites. Peppered with interesting stories about P.Y. Tang, Li Choh-ming, Gordon Wu, and so forth, it illuminates Hong Kong history “from below” and represents international history at its best. Besides, by tracing the multigenerational history of *kuashang*, the book examines Hong Kong across time and space, and tells us something about Chinese migration during the late Qing and Republican periods. Last but not least, the book is beautifully crafted, and it is clear that Hamilton wrote the book with passion. No book is perfect, though, and I would have wanted more elaboration and clarification of a few...
issues. First and foremost, the notion of ‘kuashang’ is innovative and interesting, but remains elusive at times. In the introduction, Hamilton takes pains to define kuashang: the term is more of a “strategy” than an “identity” (13). Rather than being politically or emotionally identified with the United States, the kuashang simply approached U.S. higher education pragmatically, and regarded American citizenships as “commodities” (15). They were “American-oriented,” but not necessarily “pro-American” (12). By highlighting the pragmatic and flexible nature of kuashang, Hamilton is able to include those Hong Kong Chinese who never studied in the United States, such as David Au Wei-kuo and Lam Chi-fung (Chapter 3), in a large cast of characters. Likewise, Tung Chee-hwa, the son of shipping tycoon C.Y. Tung, who graduated from the University of Liverpool in Britain but then worked in the United States for ten years, is depicted as a follower of the kuashang strategies, too (205). Being kuashang seems to have been a means to an end rather than being a member of an “imagined American community.” If so, it begs the question as to whether kuashang businessmen were really “American-oriented,” or whether they were indeed oriented toward Hong Kong or simply profit. As Hamilton notes, some kuashang were “savvy entrepreneurs” (29).

While providing brilliant accounts of the family and business history of individual kuashang, the book may overreach in arguing that the American-educated Hong Kong elites contributed to “informal decolonization” and the “shift from British to American hegemony.” Without giving a precise definition of “decolonization” or engaging with the existing literature on the British Empire国产, Hamilton generally means that the British no longer dominated Hong Kong’s economy after 1945 (but kuashang’s companies like Tang’s South Sea Textiles seemingly did), and Hong Kong’s colonial officials quietly ceded day-to-day decisions to the well-connected kuashang, as manifested in the founding and development of the Chinese University of Hong Kong under Li Choh-ming’s leadership. Although Hamilton does not use the term “informal empire” in the book, his portrayal of kuashang as willing collaborators of American Cold War projects and capitalist agendas does point to the conclusion that there emerged an American “informal empire” in Hong Kong. After all, the functioning of an informal empire depended on collaboration on the ground, not on decision-making in the metropole; the primary objectives were economic penetration and cultural influence, not political control and military occupation。The question is whether the British Empire in Hong Kong gave way to America’s “informal empire” or hegemony after 1945.

As the book is about kuashang and U.S.-Hong Kong relations, Hamilton cannot be faulted for ignoring British elites and institutions in Hong Kong or Chinese (Cantonese) businessmen. Still, in order to dispel what he calls the myth of “postwar British dominance over Hong Kong’s economy” (159), a comparative perspective is needed. Besides Tang’s South Sea Textiles, there were at least three other major textile and clothing companies in Hong Kong – Nan Fung Textiles Ltd. 南豐紡織有限公司, founded by Chen Din-hwa 陈廷驊 (dubbed “King of Cotton Yarn”); Winsor Industrial Corporation, Ltd. 南聯實業有限公司, set up by Ann Tse Kai 安子介, Chou Wen Hsien 周文軒, and Tang Hsiang Chien 唐翔千; and Lim Por-yen’s 林百欣 Lai Sun Garment 丽新製衣 and later Lai Sun Garment (International) Limited. They all contributed to Hong Kong’s industrialization and economic takeoff. Hamilton might also have counted Tang Hsiang Chien as another kuashang since he did send his son, Henry Tang Ying Yen, the future financial secretary of Hong Kong, to the United States for higher education. As Leo F. Goodstadt argues, it was a colonial myth that the newcomers from Shanghai, who numbered no more than 30,000, were “portrayed as heroic figures who transformed Hong Kong into a manufacturing centre which, almost overnight,
became a major textile exporter and joined the ranks of the world’s most successful cities.” He concludes that “although they were highly successful textile manufacturers, the immigrants could not compete in terms of either personal or corporate wealth with the leading Hong Kong business families or the major British companies.”

It is true that British colonial officials and expatriates continued to wield political power and economic influence in Hong Kong after 1945. If there were “informal decolonization” in an economic sense, the balance of power increasingly shifted from the traditional British hongs (or companies) to the Chinese (Cantonese) business groups. Whereas the textile and clothing industry was crucial to Hong Kong’s initial economic success, since the 1960s, the colony was becoming an international financial center, a global communication hub, and a popular tourist destination. In the 1970s, the four British hongs – the Hongkong Bank, Jardine Matheson, the Swire Group, and the Kadoorie family – still controlled or dominated the key sectors of banking, insurance, airlines, hotels, telecommunications, and public utilities. On the other hand, rising Cantonese businessmen made their fortunes by focusing on real estate development. One of the most famous examples was Li Ka-shing, who transformed his small plastic factory into the multi-business Cheung Kong Holdings. In 1979 Li’s company was in a position to take over Hutchison Whampoa, a British enterprise with a large portfolio of docks and real estate interests. Although the takeover marked the beginning of the end of British economic dominance in Hong Kong, Li and other Cantonese tycoons had no intention of facilitating the transition from British to American hegemony.

The description of Deng Xiaoping’s reception of Jack Tang’s delegation in June 1984 as a breakthrough may exaggerate the influence of kuashang in Hong Kong politics. The Anglo-Chinese negotiation over the future of Hong Kong began in September 1982, but it was not until late 1983 that substantial discussions between the two sides got off the ground. By June 1984, the British and Chinese had basically agreed that post-handover Hong Kong would enjoy a ‘high degree of autonomy’ and maintain its socio-economic system for 50 years under the framework of ‘one country, two systems.’ There remained unresolved issues, however, such as Beijing’s insistence on creating a joint liaison group to discuss Hong Kong affairs during the transitional period. Thus, by the time Deng received Tang’s industrial delegation on 22 June, the “one country, two systems” model was already a firm policy adopted by China. Significantly, Deng always regarded the question of Hong Kong’s future as a bilateral issue between China and Britain, while denying Hong Kong people a role in the negotiation: he sternly objected to a so-called “three-legged stool.” When Deng invited Tang and other business elites to Beijing, his primary aim was to communicate China’s policy to Hong Kong residents, not to “discuss” Hong Kong or make deals with the visitors. Hamilton is right to mention that Deng treated Tang’s delegation “with warmth,” but that he had also apparently “humiliated” the political delegation led by S. Y. Chung and Lydia Dunn, which he received on the following day. However, Deng’s different attitudes were not due to his “reading of where power rested in Hong Kong” (248-249). Rather, it was because Chung, as Senior Unofficial Member of the Executive Council, claimed much to Deng’s annoyance to reflect the opinion of the Hong Kong people about the colony’s future. Instead of trying to “lecture” Deng during their meeting, Tang more likely listened to the paramount leader patiently, despite his suggestion otherwise in an oral history interview quoted by the author (251). True, Deng was eager to woo Hong Kong’s business elites during the
Anglo-Chinese negotiations, but he did not privilege the *kuashang* over the likes of Yue-kong Pao, Li Ka-shing, and Fok Ying-tung. In 1989 the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe (with its political ramifications for the Soviet Union) marked the end of the Cold War and the “triumph” of the United States. But there was no “end-of-history” moment in Hong Kong: the British colony had never been Communist, but capitalist. Besides, Hong Kong was highly cosmopolitan, and its history had often being shaped by a multiplicity of external forces – Japanese, Southeast Asian, American, and mainland Chinese. During the Cold War, the success and indeed survival of Hong Kong depended on striking a delicate balance between the two competing powers, the United States and Communist China. Britain and China would not allow Washington (or the *kuashang*, if they so wished) to create an informal economic empire and American cultural hegemony in Hong Kong.

That said, Hamilton’s pathbreaking book is a must-read for all historians interested in Hong Kong, Chinese migration, and global capitalism. It demonstrates convincingly and vividly that the American-educated *kuashang* were one of the important groups behind Hong Kong’s economic transformation and China’s integration into the global economy.

Review by Pete Millwood, University of Hong Kong

The complex position of Hong Kong and its population in global networks of power has been drawn into relief since 2019. In response to pro-democracy, anti-government street protests that attracted perhaps millions of Hong Kongers that year, the central Beijing government sought to solidify its control over the former British colony through the 2020 National Security Law, which criminalised secession and been used to imprison some of the most prominent critics of the Hong Kong government. The UK government vocally protested the law and, in response, launched a scheme to allow former British subjects to (belatedly) resettle and work in what was once the colony’s metropole. If London’s actions angered both the Beijing and Hong Kong governments, the reaction of the United States to the 2020 crackdown prompted even greater outrage from China. President Joe Biden has promised “safe haven” to Hong Kong residents, but Washington’s response to the National Security Law has been focused on sanctioning leaders in Hong Kong and Beijing, leading to furious denunciations from a China that has long rejected any “foreign interference” in its domestic policies.

*Made in Hong Kong* was written before this latest era in Hong Kong’s extraordinary development. Nonetheless, this fascinating book offers much insight into how the territory came to be of such interest and importance not only to London and Beijing but also to Washington. Hamilton reveals how Hong Kong’s post-war history was defined at least as much by the colony’s deep transpacific ties — that is, to the United States — as it was by its relationship with the colonial metropole. He charts how, in the 1940s, the concurrent displacement from China of many local elites and the American presence in the country prefaced a profound transformation in Hong Kong. Many of these dislocated Chinese and Americans chose Hong Kong as a temporary home for what ultimately proved to be a near-three-decade interregnum before they were welcome in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). During that interregnum, Hong Kong became a focal point for the energies of many Chinese who...
looked outside of China for business and personal opportunities and for Americans who continued to seek opportunities to convert Chinese to their creed of Christian capitalism. Together, these struggling new outsiders succeeded in carving new routes to wealth and power in a colonial Hong Kong that had been dominated by British influence. Their trump card was, Hamilton argues, American financial and social capital.

To tell this story, Hamilton weaves together an array of sources, including a diverse set of archival and published English-language and Chinese-language published sources, ranging from the archives of Ivy League universities to the records of ExxonMobil, to offer a cogent account of an amorphous process: the transformation of Hong Kong’s elite social fabric from a rigid British colonial hierarchy to a more fluid and diverse space in which Chinese residents had greater paths to advancement and in which foreign influence and investment more often originated from beyond the colonial metropole.

Hamilton converts sources ranging from businessmen’s memoirs to company reports to government economic surveys into a compellingly human narrative of families that leveraged their human and social capital to rebuild their fortunes after the disaster of China’s wars of the 1930s and 1940s. Hamilton calls these individuals and families the “kuashang,” or “straddling merchants,” “a cohort of mobile, pragmatic, and adaptive Hong Kong elites” (3). He convincingly argues that the kuashangs’s collective efforts, in turn, lifted the colony they called home into a node of great significance in global capitalism: effectively run by a dependable local administration, familiar and closely tied to the American behemoth, and, from the 1970s, a gateway to a growing People’s Republic.

The book is lucidly written in lively prose and tells an absorbing story: a history of the construction of business and academic institutions that boasts a powerful human element. Simultaneously, the book will inform business and economic histories: Hamilton takes care to elucidate business decisions, showing that such choices reflected, for instance, the regulatory environment for textiles, but also social connections and the opportunities presented by, for example, access to alumni networks from American Ivy League colleges. Made in Hong Kong sheds new light on how mechanisms such as compensation trading (a form of barter in which investment was swapped for goods) allowed Hong Kong businesses but also American investors to begin setting up factories in southern China as early as 1973, years before Chairman Mao Zedong’s death. Moreover, the book makes revealing points about the replication of inequality. Hamilton’s kuashang, having rebuilt the fortunes of their families, subsequently sought to ensure that the fruits of their success were enjoyed primarily by their kin and their personal networks; one of the many lessons that they learnt from the United States was how to ensure that alumni donations privileged their own above anyone else (219).

Hamilton’s book is closely aware of the origin stories of its actors, providing coverage of the pre-1949 conditions of Hong Kong and of the mainland elites in Jiangnan who would later become the core of the kuashang. One important question raised (but perhaps not always explicitly answered) by the book, however, is the extent of the impact of Hong Kong’s unique local conditions on the longue durée of Sino-American ties. Take flows of students, for example. Hamilton makes frequent reference to how, for two years in the 1970s, Hong Kong was the largest single source of foreign students in the United States (28). This is a remarkable statistic indeed, but was not the first time that Chinese students had an outsized presence in the United States: before 1949, the United States granted more Ph.D.s to Chinese students than did any other country and nearly twenty times as many as did
neighbouring Japan, while, as late as 1945, the Republic of China government still managed to send more than a thousand students to the United States, even in the final year of the Sino-Japanese War. Hamilton’s elaborations on the attraction of American higher education to Hong Kongers show that post-1949 student flows to the United States were more than merely the displacement of previous trends. Nonetheless, I would have been interested in even more direct engagement with the question of how the rerouting of Sino-American ties via Hong Kong changed those connections from those that existed before 1949, and then shaped those that resumed from the late 1970s.

A broader historical context might also offer alternative (complementary) answers to other questions asked by Hamilton. It is clearly a significant point, for example, that Hong Kong became as oriented towards the United States as to the British metropole. The book documents this point assiduously and with impressive breadth, covering everything from flows of capital and students to marriages and club membership. Hamilton persuasively argues that one key reason for this reorientation was the conscious strategy of the kuashang: these elites accumulated social capital in the United States that was then used to circumvent obstacles to advancement in the British-run colony and, as well, to outcompete other local Chinese rivals more focused on opportunities within British-centred networks. There are other explanations available, however, for why the United States loomed so large in Hong Kong’s post-war social changes beyond kuashang choices. Perhaps the most convincing is the sheer force of the gravitational pull of the United States at the height of its post-war, pre-Vietnam War power. It might not be so remarkable, for example, that there were three times as many students from Hong Kong in the United States as in Britain in 1959 (196). That was a time when both the U.S. economy and university sector were far, far more than three times larger than their equivalents in Britain (the latter perhaps seventeen times the size of its UK equivalent). No wonder, then, that with so many opportunities in a more dynamic and expanding United States, there were so many Hong Kongers — and not just the privileged kuashang — who sought opportunities there, rather than in an austere post-war Britain ever more outpaced by its American ally. More noteworthy, I think, is the story that Hamilton so effectively tells of precisely how so many of these Hong Kongers gained access to those opportunities.

Hamilton employs the term “informal decolonization” throughout Made in Hong Kong for many aspects of the process by which British influence in the colony was diluted, whether by the growth in the power of local Chinese elites or the replacement of external British influence with American sway. The book offers extensive, compelling evidence for this process having taken place, but it is not always clear that this amounted to “informal decolonization.” The British Empire had (in contrast to rivals such as the French) long tolerated its subjects existing within social and even political structures that ran parallel to those of the empire. Indeed, Hamilton shows this at many turns, for example when the British colonial government offered generous financial incentives to American missions that wished to build schools in the colony, knowing full well that such schools would give American missionaries powerful social influence (86). Invited American influence may have shown Hong Kongers that there were other loci than London in the world, but did it bring about decolonisation? The 1997 handover of the colony to the PRC had little or nothing to do with the growth in American or even local Chinese influence in Hong Kong, and the kuashang were as nervous as any other Hong Kong residents about the 1997 switch in control (even if they also quickly identified new opportunities in the changing of the guard). The kuashang had, as Hamilton shows,
always been driven by a desire to win money and privilege rather than any change in Hong Kong’s colonial status. If we employ Hamilton’s language, it seems the processes of informal and formal decolonisation ran in parallel, rather than being causally related.

Alternative explanations and questions of terminology do not, however, reduce the value of Hamilton’s research or the contribution that his book makes to our understanding of Hong Kong’s modern history. Made in Hong Kong is a rich account of the construction of modern Hong Kong: a liminal space shaped by enterprising Chinese and non-Chinese residents who have been persistently pragmatic and judicious in making the most of the territory’s changing status. The book effectively shows how the history of post-war Hong Kong is far more than the history of a small part of the British Empire. Instead, it is at least as much the story of living in the shadow of the two great powers of our era — the United States and China — and the opportunities offered by positioning oneself in the orbit of rising wealth and power. The kuashang were (are?) better than most at responding to these shifts, as shown in Hamilton’s final chapter, which charts their pivot to an opening PRC. Explaining their change in allegiance is simple once we have read Hamilton’s account of their rise: “The dominant outside power was just shifting again—first from Britain to the United States and now to China” (252). And, not for the first time, with the kuashang, so went Hong Kong.

Review by Kazushi Minami, Osaka University

In this ambitious book, Peter E. Hamilton weaves Hong Kong, an important yet understudied subject, into the history of global capitalism. He does so by foregrounding a coterie of Chinese business tycoons, mostly men, that he names “kuashang” (3). During the Cold War, these men turned Hong Kong, which had become an impoverished British colony after World War II, into a linchpin of U.S.-China economic relations. Hamilton uses “social capital” (3) as a key concept to explain the power of kuashang. It is, in essence, connectedness. Kuashang leveraged their transpacific networks with the United States, accumulated through economic, educational, and religious ties to that country, to promote “informal decolonization” (14) that is, a repositioning of Hong Kong from an entrepôt of the British empire to a frontier of the U.S.-led “neoliberal” order (34). Hamilton calls this process “kuashang strategies” (3). Made in Hong Kong narrates how kuashang deployed these strategies to establish unofficial control over the colony and engineer an economic miracle, while amassing enormous wealth along the way. The result is a new history of global capitalism, centered around the kuashang’s creativity, shrewdness, and greed.

The eight chapters follow the rise of the kuashang from refugees who escaped the Chinese Communist Revolution of 1949 to conduits of U.S. influence in the British colony in the 1950s and 1960s to brokers of U.S.-China business deals from the 1970s onwards. This rise was conditioned by the Cold War. Chapter 1 shows, for example, that the U.S. economic embargo against China in the wake of the Korean War drew Hong Kong into the U.S. orbit, which facilitated U.S. bank credits and corporate investments as discussed in Chapter 5. Chapter 4 analyzes how U.S. Cold War immigration policy aimed at screening “the good immigrants,” epitomized by the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, caused the swelling of Hong Kong students in the United States. This trend enabled Li Choh-ming, Vice Chancellor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (1963-1978), to build a “transpacific” university
(130), recruiting U.S.-trained faculty and sending graduates to U.S. universities. Chapters 7 examines the critical role Hong Kong played during the Sino-American rapprochement of the 1970s. It reveals that the kuashang not only profited from the nascent China trade, but also tied China to U.S.-led global capitalism by “midwifing” (5) its Reform and Opening-Up. The Cold War shaped kuashang strategies as much as it was shaped by them.

Made in Hong Kong is a solidly-researched, provocatively-argued study, and Hamilton deserves much praise for his achievement. Now we can no longer think about the Cold War in East Asia, China’s economic rise, and the making of global capitalism without Hong Kong in mind. Instead of cataloguing the book’s numerous strengths, for the purposes of this roundtable I will raise five broad questions or issues.

The first question is whether the United States was an empire. Hamilton characterizes U.S. involvements in Hong Kong as an “imperial project” to build a “transpacific empire” (29, 34) and kuashang as collaborators of “U.S. imperial expansion” (9). Although U.S. educational and economic investments in the British colony were not philanthropic, the definition of U.S. “empire” provided here seems a little loose. U.S. influence in Hong Kong resembles “empire by invitation,” but as Hamilton points out, the invitation came from kuashang, who represented no state (147). It also resembles “informal empire,” but the process of empire-building was dominated by kuashang, although Washington did mobilize its “state-private networks” (96). Hamilton seems to conceive U.S. “empire” as “connections” through which countries around the world gravitated to U.S. “power,” but the discussion on “empire” would benefit from further clarification of the term.

The second issue concerns whether the kuashang were anti-Communist. As with other parts of East Asia, anti-Communism was a critical component of Hong Kong’s economic development. Having fled the mainland, many kuashang were inherently anti-Communist, and it served their kuashang strategies of collaborating with the United States, as exemplified by Yale-in-China’s financial support for New Asia College (115-117). But the kuashang proved pragmatic enough to cooperate with the Chinese Communists from the 1970s onward, even after the Tiananmen Square Massacre (chapter 8). Was the anti-Communism of the kuashang genuine, or was it more of a rhetorical device to solicit U.S. aid? A related question is the level of threat that the kuashang and their U.S. partners saw in Chinese Communist influence in Hong Kong, particularly when Cultural Revolution-inspired violence engulfed it in 1967 (183).

As to whether the kuashang “anticipated” China’s reform (221), Hamilton debunks the popular myth that Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping single-handedly initiated reform in 1978-79. The onset of reform was a prolonged process spanning the 1970s, in which Hong Kong played an important role. Not only were the kuashang a crucial intermediary of U.S.-China trade, they also provided capital, technology, and managerial knowledge for mainland Chinese, including local officials in Bao’an, today’s Shenzhen, who were conducting economic experiments like compensation trade to promote export-led production. Hamilton writes that by the late 1970s, the kuashang, particularly those in the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, “had long anticipated wider reforms” (237). While
Hong Kong was undoubtedly instrumental for Beijing’s launch of reform, the word “anticipate” seems a little unclear. Did the *kuashang* predict China’s reform? Did they just hope for it? Or, were they simply exploiting new business opportunities in the late years of Chairman Mao Zedong’s rule?

In terms of how the Oil Shock affected *kuashang* strategies, Hamilton challenges Western theories on the East Asian economic miracle that generalize Hong Kong as one of the four East Asian “dragons” and attribute its success to the developmentalist state and the Confucian work ethic. As he explains, there was no developmentalist state in Hong Kong, and its wealth derived from the *kuashang*’s economic predation on the cheap labor force. I wonder whether Hong Kong benefited from another factor that contributed to the economic miracle in the region: the global lending boom resulting from the expansion of offshore dollar markets after the 1973 Oil Shock. Did *kuashang* bankers tap into these markets to invest in the mainland, particularly at the onset of reform?

The conclusion of *Made in Hong Kong* carries readers to 2020 and ends just before the historical watershed: the passage of the Hong Kong National Security Law. Where is Hong Kong heading now? The *kuashang* used their social capital to inextricably connect the U.S. and Chinese economies, but the demise of “One Country, Two Systems,” and the mass exodus that ensued, seem to have sealed their fate. Is this the end of *kuashang* strategies, or can the *kuashang* survive the emerging new cold war?

Review by Meredith Oyen, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

I remember hearing a (likely apocryphal) tale of a Hong Kong businessman who spent so much of his life shuttling between his home city and American clients that on his latest immigration entry card upon landing in the United States, he listed his address as “Cathay Pacific, seat 1A.” In the early 2000s, this story served as an illustration making the case for a history of the “Pacific World,” to counter and offset the history of the Atlantic World. I pictured this unknown weary, jetlagged traveler identifying himself as a permanent resident of his first-class airplane seat a number of times while reading Peter E. Hamilton’s remarkable book, *Made in Hong Kong: Transpacific Networks and a New History of Globalization*. *Made in Hong Kong* looks at the long Cold War history of Hong Kong and argues that it was critical to the story of postwar globalization. More specifically, that a certain kind of Hong Kong resident was central to this story: people he terms the “*kuashang* (跨商).” Hamilton’s *kuashang* are transnational migrants – some fled China for Hong Kong during World War Two or Chinese Civil War, but nearly all pursued educational opportunities in the United States for themselves or their families and turned those experiences into the social capital needed to navigate changing circumstances back in Hong Kong. With insider knowledge and personal connections built from transnational educational opportunities, they helped to facilitate an “informal decolonization” (5) of Hong Kong long before 1997 and build the networks necessary to restart economic ties between mainland China and the United States in 1970s. In the process, they helped to develop the Hong Kong economy and affect the way globalization took place in the Pacific.
The *kuashang* are singular figures in an already unique place. Hong Kong has captured increasing attention by historians over the last decade as a site of both Cold War conflict and a longer history vital to forging deep connections between the United States and China. Hong Kong proved unique in the postwar era as a colonial territory that did not seek formal decolonization; as an offshore “listening post” for an American superpower that was very concerned with Communist China but barred direct contact with it; and as a site of constant movement, as refugees flooded the colony after 1949 and in waves in the decades that followed. Instead of coming into the colony and seeking livelihoods there or using the space as a way-station toward a more attractive life post-emigration, the *kuashang* used connections to the United States and its capitalist system, leveraged American interest in China and the Chinese market, and negotiated space for American style education and business practices in the British empire. Wherever possible, Hamilton moves beyond the “official” records housed in the British and American National Archives to make use of the papers of individuals and organizations housed in libraries and university collections in Hong Kong and the United States, as well as newspapers and published collections of primary sources in English, Mandarin and Cantonese. In eight densely researched chapters, Hamilton unpacks this process over the course of four decades, offering rich, detailed accounts of individual lives and choices and demonstrating the ways in which they became building blocks in what Hong Kong, and the U.S. relationship with China, would eventually become.

Hamilton makes the case that existing histories of Hong Kong’s economic development can prove unsatisfying, in part because of scholars’ tendency to focus on the unmoving parts of the story: they look to British policies that created ripe conditions for free enterprise to flourish, or group Hong Kong together with the rest of the “four little tigers” (Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore) and focus on the “Confucian values” and other shared characteristics of success, including economic connections with Japan, the role of governance, and state-led economic reform. What these studies miss is that there were many Hong Kong actors – both well connected and non-elite – whose interests and especially movements helped to create the conditions that made Hong Kong into an economic success story, but also a truly singular site of globalization. Or, as Hamilton puts it, they lack “an explanation that foregrounds the agency of [Hong Kong’s] Chinese residents” (193-194).

Based upon the description of the *kuashang* – noting the pattern of a family that connected with American missionary efforts in China, perhaps sent their children to the United States to learn, and then used the cultural capital and the transnationalism of the family (both in attitude and in terms of frequent transpacific travel) to develop the family’s business interests and create the conditions politically around them that would contribute to their success – one might be forgiven (I hope, because I’m describing myself here) for thinking first of the Soong family, not of Hong Kong tycoons. Businessman Charlie Soong and his children, including his son, the one-time Republic of China Premier T.V. Soong; daughter Ai-ling and her husband, ROC finance minister H.H. Kung; and daughter Mei-ling, also known as Madame Chiang Kai-shek, seem to be *kuashang* par excellence, though with fruits of the social, cultural, and financial capital eventually benefitting the Republic of China on Taiwan, not Hong Kong. Perhaps even daughter Ching-ling Soong, who married Sun Yat-sen and became a major force in the government of the People’s Republic of China, would qualify. To me, this raises a question. Certainly, the *kuashang* played a particular role in Hong Kong based on its distinctive historical circumstances, and that is well documented by Hamilton through his stories of
the American missionaries and the U.S. funded educational outreach to the Hong Kong refugees, the creation of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the development of the American Chamber of Commerce, and the incredible levels of U.S. influence the kuashang made space for in the British colony. But do kuashang play similar roles in other contexts? In fact, aren’t kuashang strategies – albeit within the also quite unique context of postwar Taiwan – every bit as instrumental in shaping that economy’s growth and interconnectedness with the United States, as well as ensuring continued U.S. military and political support for decades when there were many good arguments for withdrawing or modifying it?

This is not a critique of Hamilton’s excellent book; on the contrary, it represents pure excitement about his argument for importance of transnational movements of even non-elite individuals in the development of Hong Kong. The patterns it highlights are so interesting that it is easy to take his theoretical model and try to apply it elsewhere. Taiwan is an obvious starting place, but the concept would seem relevant to South Korea as well. Singapore (as the fourth of the four tigers) had more cultural and educational links to Britain. But are kuashang strategies and the cultural capital that they created part of the explanation for the economic miracles enjoyed by all or most of the four little tigers? Or at the very least, a better one than ‘Confucian values’?

Throughout his work, Hamilton uses many personal stories to help illustrate who the kuashang were and how their connections contributed to the growth of Hong Kong. The history of education in Hong Kong proves especially important to his narrative – the presence of U.S. missionary schools in Republican China, the role of missionary and non-profit efforts (often with the U.S. government offering secret financial support) in building educational infrastructure in Hong Kong once it faced its Cold War era deluge of refugees who ‘voted with their feet’ against Communism (and therefore merited extra attention from the United States). The creation of the first Chinese language university – an oddity in British imperial history, especially for the extent to which it conformed with U.S. education models including the creation of an MBA degree – also plays a significant role in educating the kuashang from non-elite backgrounds and creating opportunities for them to use connections built in Hong Kong to further their studies in the United States. Hamilton notes that by the 1970s, Hong Kong sent more international students to the United States than any other locality. Those numbers helped to create the movements and forge the connections that build the globalized Hong Kong economy, but given the history of Chinese migration in and out of the United States, the ease of movement is somewhat striking. Even accounting for the changes to U.S. immigration law in the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that opened doors for the highly educated and those with family ties to the United States – disproportionately opening the door to Asian migrations – there is little discussion of bad experiences with racism, immigration hurdles, or challenges with visas or green cards. Did these experiences not enter the personal papers and stories that the kuashang told of their later successes? Were they just very lucky in their encounters with U.S. visa and border control systems? These kinds of issues are striking in their absence in the book, and I would be interested to hear from its author as to why that might be.

Overall, this is an extraordinary book, and the personal stories and sense of narrative make it accessible even to those who might panic a little at the words ‘economic history.’ It’s a wonderful addition to the literature on Hong Kong, and I am grateful for the chance to read it.
Response by Peter E. Hamilton, Lingnan University, Hong Kong

I would like first to express my sincere thanks to Chi-kwan Mark, Pete Millwood, Kazushi Minami, and Meredith Oyen for the time, thought, and energy that they have invested in reviewing *Made in Hong Kong*. While praise is always gratifying, I am also particularly grateful for their thoughtful questions and critiques. It’s an honor since the research of several reviewers helped inspire this project in the first place. I’d also like to thank Taomo Zhou for conceiving of and organizing this roundtable, and John Carroll for bringing it all together. I hope that my lengthy response testifies to the richness of the reviews and the many possibilities here for further research and discussion.

One theme spans multiple reviews: this study’s implications for ideas of American “empire” in Cold War Hong Kong. Chi-kwan Mark queries whether an American ‘informal empire’ developed to displace the British, while Kazushi Minami posits that ‘empire’ might not accurately describe these American activities. As Minami notes, I drew my inspiration from Paul Kramer’s 2011 re-theorization of ‘the imperial’ in U.S. international history as “a category of analysis, not a kind of entity, something to think with more than think about.” In my understanding, Kramer sought to push past debates over whether or not the United States has been “an empire” in order to refine ‘the imperial’ as a methodology through which to examine how its asymmetries of power have operated over long-distance connections and created mutual entanglement and transformation on the ground.

While my study was primarily positioned within Chinese and global historiographies, these arguments were nonetheless formative—not only by expanding my conception of American empire beyond locations subjected to Washington’s violence or direction, but also by offering an alternative to the often-triumphant language of transnationalism. Such rhetoric has long bedeviled discussion of Hong Kong. Many otherwise esteemed scholars have reduced this place to a vaguely international gateway through which global capital, commodities, and millions of migrants seem to effortlessly flow. Such portrayals have routinely elided Hong Kong people from their own global history, while traditional conceptions of American empire have overlooked Hong Kong’s transformative connections with the United States during the Cold War.

*Made in Hong Kong*’s entwined terminologies of *kuashang* (or “straddling merchants”) strategies, American social capital, informal decolonization, and collaboration with U.S. imperial projects seek to correct and re-frame these issues. In my view, discussing an array of U.S. ‘imperial projects’ in Hong Kong—rather than an American ‘informal empire’—helps to push us beyond the U.S. Consulate-General to explore the extensive but overlooked imprint of such projects throughout Hong Kong society. While any ensuing imprecision is my own shortcoming, I believe we gain two vital insights as a result.

The first is emphasizing Hong Kong people’s own agency in these projects and on the world stage, including how power, self-interest, and inequality structured their choices. Although ‘informal empire’ is defined by collaboration on the ground, this term and its literature still emphasize the imperial-state’s agenda and define local actors as collaborators or opponents thereof. This paradigm might be accurate in other contexts, but I would argue that it is not for Hong Kong. In *Made in Hong Kong*’s entwined terminologies of *kuashang* strategies, American social capital, informal decolonization, and collaboration with U.S. imperial projects seek to correct and re-frame these issues.
Kong, most of the American missionary groups, foundations, universities, corporations, and officials appear as supporting investors and donors, not as the lead actors. My sources testify that it was usually those whom I term as kuashang who conceived of the initial idea and then recruited potential American partners—from Chapter 3’s Lam Chi-fung first imagining a Baptist College to Chapter 5’s local Mobil executive John Soong championing the construction of Mei Foo Sun Chuen. Routinely, these American backers were hesitant, and kuashang actors used their American social capital to persuade them, such as when Li & Fung persuaded The Gap to source fabric from the People’s Republic of China (PRC, Chapter 7). In some cases, kuashang actors even played their American backers and colonial officials off one another, such as Chapter 3’s David Au in his strategy to secure Chung Chi’s permanent campus.

Thus, I argue that what we see in Cold War Hong Kong is not a space in which American ‘informal empire’ set the agenda—a scenario that London and Beijing both prevented, as Mark’s 2004 monograph ably shows—but a far more granular phenomenon in which well-positioned local people, companies, and organizations connected themselves with American power in order to advance their own agendas. As I state throughout the book, this is indeed collaboration with U.S. imperial power, but I think ‘informal empire’ would downplay these actors’ own initiative and motivations. In turn, Geir Lundestad defined ‘empire by invitation’ with reference to state-based invitations. My kuashang term seeks instead to foreground how Hong Kong private-sector elites’ strategies evolved from an older history of overseas Chinese merchants’ (or huashang) strategies of collaboration with European empires in Asia—but now re-tailored to suit collaboration with the U.S. hegemon.

Alongside Hong Kong people’s agency, these terminologies seek to underscore that such transpacific strategies overlapped and co-existed with formal British rule. Early in this project, I found that discussing an American ‘informal empire’ elicited confusion or provoked insistent declarations that “Hong Kong was British!” This was not a binary, however. While kuashang strategies and informal decolonization did exploit British imperial decline, neither was defined by anti-British animosity. These actors were not anti-colonial nationalists and their goal was never to replace British with American rule. Instead, their goal was to take advantage of the stability provided by British rule while leveraging their transpacific networks to get ahead, particularly when the British became inconvenient. Both literally and metaphorically, kuashang strategists were quite capable of spending the morning on the phone with their New York investors and lunching with colonial officials in the afternoon. The sources suggest that most thought little of that. Or as discussed regarding Chapter 4’s Li Choh-ming, he did not oppose British connections for the Chinese University, but rather focused his time and energy on what he deemed most valuable: building connections with the United States. While some British officials did feel threatened, many others did not and I don’t think that most of the individuals that I term as kuashang saw their strategies as a zero-sum game, but rather saw them as a pragmatic reading of the international terrain of power and, as Mark rightly puts it, a means to an end. While we could debate whether an American informal empire in Hong Kong co-existed with the formal British empire, I suspect that approach will lead us back into the perspectives stored at College Park and Kew. Put most simply, when Hong Kong people such as Li Choh-ming, Chapter 1’s Ansie Lee Sperry, or Chapter 5’s H.J. Shen challenged and prevailed over British colonial dictates and hierarchies, they were neither trying to overthrow the colonial government nor to establish an American ‘informal empire’. They were using their connections to American power to get ahead.
In parallel, I would stress that my term ‘informal decolonization’ does not refer to a transfer of power from Britain to the United States, but rather from Britain to elite U.S.-connected Chinese actors. As postcolonial theorists have emphasized, decolonization is a long and on-going process in ways of knowing, laboring, and being. I would argue that in many societies informal decolonization both preceded formal decolonization and continued afterward through educational reform, language revival, new economic policies, and so on. Informal decolonization thus combines and overlaps with terms such as ‘economic decolonization’ and ‘cultural decolonization.’ One advantage of this term is that it does not teleologically pre-suppose that nationalism or the nation-state are the outcomes of all decolonization processes. On this point, while few scholars still portray Hong Kong’s postwar colonial regime as benevolent, most still do characterize its public as content or indifferent to colonialism, and merely waiting for this territory’s uncertain future to be resolved for them by London and Beijing. I suspect that this portrayal stems from hunting in vain for the signposts that marked most other colonized societies’ decolonization journeys: mass political organizations, labor movements, boycotts, democratization, and so on. While similar events occurred in Cold War Hong Kong (most famously the 1966-67 riots), it was never on the path to becoming a nation-state.

That does not mean, however, that its residents were somehow frozen in time, blind to British imperial decline, or idly waiting for the 1997 event-horizon. Instead, informal decolonization seeks to capture that many Hong Kong elites were well aware that the British empire was unraveling, unenthusiastic about a PRC takeover, and prepared to act accordingly in pursuit of their personal self-interest. While some Anglophilic Cantonese elites continued to focus on rising within colonial systems, from 1949 on the actors in Made in Hong Kong developed collaborations with the new center of global power in order to get ahead economically, claim positions of status and influence long reserved for the British overlords, and simultaneously secure their family members’ exit strategies. It is worth underscoring that this strategic response was not limited to those I term kuashang or to the United States, though. As I discuss in Chapter 5, even very U.S.-oriented kuashang families such as the Tangs worried that they over-relied on the United States and pursued new ties with Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia, Kenya, Tanzania, and other countries. Those efforts never grew sufficiently to displace the United States, however, until mainland China’s opportunities and a tacit bargain with Beijing coaxed them to re-balance (Chapter 8).

Pete Millwood questions whether kuashang strategies might simply reflect “the sheer force of the gravitational pull of the United States at the height of its post-war, pre-Vietnam War power.” I tried in the book not to normativize U.S. hegemony as self-evident, universally appealing, or universally accessible. I think it’s fair to say there was a certain momentum, particularly among comparative latecomers such as Lawrence Kadoorie’s pursuit of Esso (Chapter 5) or the shipping tycoon C.Y. Tung’s abrupt pivot toward the United States (Chapter 6). Yet, even when such supra-elites joined the trend to re-organize their futures around connections with the United States, it still took effort and contacts to make these shifts happen. After all, Kadoorie’s first choice was Royal Dutch Shell, which rejected him, while Tung Chee-hwa was surprised by his father’s sudden decision to re-route his life to America. Gravitational pull makes it sound effortless and obvious, but these shifts were not—most especially for non-white colonial subjects, no matter how posh.

Underscoring this reality helps to pose tentative answers to Meredith Oyen’s insightful questions of both comparison with other transpacific circulations and these individuals’ apparent lack of migration challenges. Oyen first underscores that overlapping prewar histories endowed many Chinese elites
with the resources to pursue *kuashang* strategies if they had desired, such as the famous Soong family. Indeed, Chapter 1’s Kinmay Tang was their first cousin, so the *kuashang* very much emerged from such Sino-American histories. Yet, the Communist transition drastically reduced the number of people positioned to pursue such strategies, while post-1949 Taiwan was a very different context from post-1949 Hong Kong. It is thus an open and important question as to what role transpacific networks and circulations played in places such as Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea. As I stress in the book, these three contexts pursued radically different political and economic policies from Hong Kong, from martial law and national defense industries to import-substitution trade policies. Thus, we cannot assume that their transpacific circulations had the same origins, natures, or outcomes (let alone continue lumping them together under racialized animal metaphors). A crucial influence in this vein was AnnaLee Saxenian’s analysis of the connections between U.S. higher education, Silicon Valley, and the computer industries in Taiwan, Israel, India, and mainland China. As I discuss in Chapter 6, Saxenian’s research helps to underscore that Taiwanese student flows to the United States created very different economic outcomes from Hong Kong’s. While U.S. returnees turbocharged Taiwan’s Hsinchu Industrial Park, Hong Kong’s U.S. returnees had little to do with electronics and the colony eventually lost this entire industry.

This is a very rich field for further research spanning U.S. and global histories. For now, I think two things distinguish Hong Kong analytically. The first is its non-national status and the second is its students’ rate of self-support. Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea—as well as India, Iran, and Israel—were either postcolonial developmental nation-states and/or key U.S. allies during the Cold War. As a result, their large flows of student talent to U.S. colleges and universities were heavily state-sponsored, from scholarships to policies directing students’ choice of study. While the Hong Kong colonial government never opposed studies in the United States, such journeys were also never its policy. Thus, I concluded that Hong Kong was a comparatively unusual and interesting case in which the local government’s agency played little role in driving its huge transpacific student flows.

In turn, Millwood asks whether it is surprising that far more Hong Kong students chose to study in the United States than in austere postwar Britain? While millions of people around the world would have leapt at the chance to study in the United States—or the United Kingdom—during the Cold War, very few were prepared to gain admission, let alone afford the tuition. These barriers, ranging from poverty to minimal state support, were just as true for Hong Kong. Yet, somehow, not only did many more Hong Kong people get the chance to study overseas (particularly when considered as a percentage of population), but also the majority before the late 1970s chose to study in a country that was not subsidized by their local or imperial government. Indeed, Institute of International Education (IIE) data confirms that Hong Kong students had one of the highest rates of self-support among any international student group in the United States, indicating a well-off background. To my mind, we thus have a two-fold explanation. First, there was the transplantation of Republican elites’ focus on U.S. higher education (Chapter 1). Second, that elite preference expanded into mass opportunities through the resources provided by U.S. imperial projects in Hong Kong and *kuashang* figures like Lam Chi-fung and Li Choh-ming (Chapters 2, 3, and 4).

Oyen also notes the *kuashang*’s striking “ease of movement” and seeming lack of negative experiences with U.S. immigration, even when accounting for shifts in post-1965 U.S. immigration law. It is also a noticeable absence in the sources, one that contributed to this study’s focus on
networks. Over and over, from oral history interviews to self-published memoirs, these figures mentioned that they were picked up upon arrival in the United States by friends or family who were already living there, such as siblings attending U.S. institutions or even the local Chinese Consul-General. These comments do not just testify to their privilege, but more specifically, to the inherited transpacific networks that structured and eased their journeys. Particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, it mattered that someone knowledgeable and connected was waiting to retrieve them, from warning them in advance about the procedures to advocating for them if anything went awry. In short, this absence in the sources underscored to me just how powerful social capital can be. We might think of Li Choh-ming moving heaven and earth so that his brother Choh-hao gained admission to Berkeley, or Gordon Wu’s brother Clyde persuading him to transfer from the University of Manitoba to Princeton (and likely assisting with the paperwork). Again, it wasn’t always easy, but the right networks made such journeys much more so.

I do think that there is another aspect to this absence, however, one that I lacked the space to explore fully in the book. Many of these figures actually went out of their way to deny any experience whatsoever of racism in the United States. I suspect a complex medley of personal and structural reasons for such assertions that I will briefly list: 1) the nature of the sources and a common nostalgic rewriting of the past due to age; 2) the reality that U.S. Exclusion policies and Orientalist cultures always demarcated Chinese students as “high-class” exemptions to policies aimed against working-class immigrants; 3) the outcome of many already possessing substantial American social and cultural capital, such as speaking fluent English; 4) a certain inurement toward racism through prior experiences in British-dominated Shanghai and Hong Kong (i.e. not surprising); and 5) their own elitist effort to distance themselves from working-class immigrants whom they perceived as the primary targets of such abuse. I think a similar medley plays out in these sources’ portrayals of their interactions with Hong Kong colonial officials. On the rare occasions that moments of racism were mentioned—such as P.Y. Tang’s meeting with the New York buyer Charles Meltzer (180)—it stood out and I suspect the situation must have been particularly excruciating.

Such business interactions bring us to the economic side of kuashang strategies and informal decolonization. Mark questions the ‘balance of power’ between kuashang actors and other groups such as the big Cantonese developers and British hongs, including the late Leo Goodstadt’s assertion that the Shanghainese “immigrants could not compete in terms of either personal or corporate wealth with the leading Hong Kong business families or the major British companies.”[33] This might or might not be true (these groups are ill-defined and all these actors’ estimates of their own net worth merit caution), but there are other key nuances worth emphasizing.

First, I would reiterate that the term kuashang does not connote a self-identified group, but rather an individualized strategy that was adopted and adapted by many different Shanghainese, Cantonese, Chaozhou, South Asian, Jewish, and other Hong Kong-based actors. While first evident among the émigré industrialists, it was neither universal among them (as exemplified by the Lee family of the TAL Group) nor limited to them (as exemplified by Li & Fung or Gordon Wu). Throughout the book, we see bankers, trading firms, real estate developers, academics, and even British hongs and families such as the Kadoories pursue transformative transpacific networks and opportunities. While the Kadoories rose to success under British colonialism, China Light and Power’s survival as a private company depended on Lawrence tapping an old American friend from Shanghai to help him cultivate
a new corporate American partner and recruit its investment. By both necessity and opportunity, kuashang strategies thus expanded across a cross-section of identity groups and professions amid Hong Kong’s economic evolution, and the ensuing informal decolonization is not about an internal ‘balance of power’ between competing groups, but rather about how increasing numbers of all Hong Kong firms and families reoriented their home from British imperial toward American imperial networks—even if those actors held British passports.

In turn, we should be cautious of framing different elite groups in Hong Kong as self-contained, or reducing Hong Kong’s economic history to appraisals of who was the richest. While sources do testify to rivalry between the Shanghainese and Cantonese, a closer reading urges us not to exaggerate this conflict. As Chapter 1’s Ansie and Henry Sperry testify, the reality was often more complicated. Ansie came from one of Hong Kong’s most established Cantonese families, but she married an American banker in Shanghai in 1946. Future Shanghainese ‘immigrant’ K.P. Chen Guangfu stood in for her father by walking her down the aisle. They all then fled to Hong Kong, whereupon Chen tapped Ansie’s brothers in an effort to give the Shanghai Commercial and Savings Bank a ‘local’ Cantonese flavor, while their cousin Q.W. Lee was simultaneously rising at the Hang Seng Bank. Thus, within one close network we see that leading Shanghainese, Cantonese, and American bankers could be intimately interconnected and mutually supportive. In turn, the Sperrys and the Tangs were close family friends, but Kinmay Tang identified as Cantonese and her Wuxi-born (Shanghainese in Hong Kong) husband P.Y. Tang became a mentor to the Cantonese academic Li Choh-ming. Vice-Chancellor Li was even a pallbearer at P.Y. Tang’s funeral. Thus, we cannot take these labels at face value or allow them to marginalize lived social and professional interconnections. In such a small place, my reading is that personal affection, reputation, and shared social and educational links mattered as much or more to the strength of ties at this point in time. Indeed, I suspect that the more serious divide was between those who considered themselves to be ‘old money’ versus those deemed ‘new money.’ Jack Tang, for one, revealingly labeled many of the real estate tycoons as “slumlords.”[34]

In turn, when analyzing economic change, the question is not who is the richest. Rather, the question should be: which business ventures and policies drove the engine of local economic growth and why? While questions of economic development are complex and easily politicized, I generally see soaring real estate values and investment totals as a secondary response to deliberate policies and society’s broader capital formation—not its cause. Hong Kong’s big developers have certainly generated stupendous fortunes since the 1970s, but their extreme accumulations grew primarily by exploiting colonial policies of artificial land scarcity (a topic unto itself), the territory’s prior industrial and financial development, and expanding local educational opportunity with rising middle-class access to the professions. While kuashang strategies were by no means responsible for all these things, they were an important piece of this equation.

Finally, I’ll wrap up with Jack Tang’s 1984 meeting with paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, which opens Chapter 8. I do not think that its significance stems from the development of the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ policy, which was indeed largely already settled. The chapter emphasizes that this meeting’s significance instead revolves around Hong Kong elites’ willingness to trust in Deng’s promises and later the Joint Declaration’s terms. These are very different things and the tacit ‘bargain’ to which I refer. At the time, most Hong Kong elites retained a deeply embedded sense of anti-Communism. Outright pro-CCP advocates like Henry Fok Ying-tung were rare. For example,
Mark mentions Y.K. Pao and Li Ka-shing. Yet, Pao had already sent all four of his daughters to the United States for school and often work (likely enabling permanent residency or naturalization), while Li Ka-shing and his family took Canadian citizenship. Future Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa too admitted that all of his children had filed for birthright US citizenship. It is thus fair to say that all these figures were hedging their bets by securing exit strategies. It would be surprising if they had not since this trust deficit was pervasive, as evident by this period’s emigration numbers, stock market tumbles, and daily newspaper headlines. Mark posits that Tang likely went to listen ‘patiently’ to the ‘paramount leader,’ but I would argue this reproduces a state-based perspective. Elite foreign-passport holders like Jack Tang could easily have liquidated their local assets and moved overseas before 1997 if they had wished (again, hundreds of thousands of upper middle-class residents did that). Tang thus did not go to Beijing to demand a seat at the negotiating table. Instead, his assertion is credible that he went to get a sense of Deng as a person and to reiterate local business elites’ non-negotiables, including freedom of movement. While Deng might have wished for these Hong Kong capitalists to listen patiently, I suspect that such a savvy and pragmatic personality knew that he was speaking with an influential and high flight-risk U.S. citizen (and Soong Mei-ling’s first cousin once removed to boot). Put simply, it mattered how this delegation reported back after this meeting to their Hong Kong and international colleagues, particularly behind closed doors. In turn, it mattered what business decisions they took next: to initiate a fire sale or to invest in new mainland ventures. We know what most of them chose.

I will leave it there, but thank you again to everyone who has made this great conversation possible. I think the issues and themes at work here are of great relevance, and I hope that future studies will challenge, refine, and revise my arguments. I look forward to reading them.

Notes


The book does not go into detail about Hong Kong’s other transpacific links, although it does suggest these were meaningful: Hamilton states that Canada received about 70% as many Hong Kong migrants as the United States in the forty years after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (199).

They were, almost to a man, men, a point made by Hamilton and explored in some detail in the text. Among the memoirs cited are H. C. Ting, *Truth and Facts: Recollections of a Hong Kong Industrialist* (Hong Kong: Kader Industrial, 1974) and Peter Quay Yang, *Recollections at Random* (Hong Kong: Signal Printing, 2013).


[18] The few works that deal with Hong Kong during the Cold War, especially its refugee crises, include: Hsu, Good Immigrants; and Meredith Oyen, The Diplomacy of Migration: Transnational Lives and the Making of U.S.-Chinese Relations in the Cold War (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015). On China’s economic rise, see, for example, Yasheng Huang, Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the State (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).


[22] For a recent example, see Jennifer M. Miller, Cold War Democracy: The United States and Japan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).
On how Mao’s China flirted with capitalism through Bao’an since the early 1960s, see Zhou Taomo, “Leveraging Liminality: The Border Town of Bao’an (Shenzhen) and the Origins of China’s Reform and Opening,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 80:2 (2021): 337-361.


I encountered it while working as a TA a class on the Pacific World designed and taught by Dr. Carol Benedict at Georgetown University at least two decades ago, though any details beyond that long escape me.


This is the obvious example – the one the “person on the street” (especially if the street was immediately outside an AHA or AAS annual conference meeting) would come up with. But it would not be difficult to come up with other examples of ROC business and political leaders who developed this kind of social and cultural capital and network through U.S. educational opportunities. It would not look the same as Hong Kong. Many Taiwan universities have their roots in the Japanese imperial era, but American influence post 1949 is hard to deny. And National Chengchi University set up a very early Chinese language MBA program of their own, establishing it in partnership with the University of Michigan in 1964. (See the history section of their website here: https://mba.nccu.edu.tw/zh_tw/introduction/aa).

This is an interesting figure, because it is based on the IIE’s statistics counting the numbers of foreign students in the United States for any given year (Hamilton, 196). However, looking at INS Annual Reports suggests that Japan, Iran, and other localities usually had more students enter the United States in any given year. China and Taiwan were tracked as a single entity through 1971 and often had numbers neck and neck with Hong Kong; after they were divided out for statistical purposes, for the rest of the 1970s Taiwan ran at about half the number of student entries as Hong Kong. These reports are available digitized through HathiTrust here: https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000546059. The numbers of international students in the U.S. themselves, and even the point that Hong Kong’s numbers were the highest, feels less significant to me than just the idea that Hong Kong sent a lot. They were a powerhouse alongside Japan and Iran in terms of most students traveling to the United States for study in the 1970s. But that Taiwan and South Korea generally also recorded significant numbers of student entries fans the flames of my interest in how “kuashang” style strategies contributed to those economies.


