



Adelyn Lim

*Transnational Feminism and
Women's Movements in Post-1997
Hong Kong: Solidarity Beyond the
State*

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reviewed by [Kyungja Jung](#)

1. Feminist academics and activists across the world often question: What does feminism mean in the contemporary context? What constitutes feminism in a rapidly changing social and political context? How can feminists engage with the state and other social movements? And what has globalization brought to women's activism in the local and national context? This book, *Transnational Feminism and Women's Movements in Post-1997 Hong Kong: Solidarity Beyond the State*, by Adelyn Lim, explores these critical questions and offers a unique glimpse into women's movements and women's activism in post-1997 Hong Kong under the People's Republic of China (PRC)—a rarely researched topic. Based on in-depth interviews with fifty-five women activists from women's groups in Hong Kong, focus group discussions, and participant observations at various campaigns and events and a variety of sources, Lim provides a more critical and comprehensive understanding of women's activism in post-1997 Hong Kong. The book presents a detailed analysis of major activists, organisations, campaigns and strategies that women's groups in Hong Kong have adopted to address a range of issues, namely, the feminisation of poverty, violence against women, prostitution and sex workers and domestic workers. In doing so, Lim uncovers the contradictions and complexities women's activists face in Hong Kong while making efforts to embrace differences in perspectives and strategies among women activists and members/constituencies, to include newly emerging groups such as labour migrants, and to respond to the changes and opportunities influenced by globalization.
2. Throughout the chapters, the author highlights the conceptualisation of feminism as a collective action frame rather than a collective identity. She argues that 'feminism as a frame ... is continuously being constituted, contested, reproduced and displaced by other frames during the course of mobilisation' (p. 19) and that the frame has been shaped by sociocultural, economic and political contexts and is open to renegotiation (p. 87). For example, the author presents the politics surrounding sex work in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, women activists, not sharing the same view about prostitution, through 'ongoing processes of self-critique and collective reflection' learn different perspectives and positions and collaboratively engage in public education and advocacy on sex workers.
3. The engagement of women's movements with the state or institution has been a recurrently debated

topic among feminist activists not only in Hong Kong, but across the world. For example, the author presents two different approaches that two women's groups have adopted while dealing with violence against women. The Hong Kong Federation maintains distance from feminism which might give it a bad reputation for presenting 'oppositional forms of collective action,' (p. 11) and being afraid of ruining its relationship with the PRC and the Hong Kong governments. They adopted strategies based on degendered aims such as family stability, social harmony and social management. On the other hand, NKWCEO (Hong Kong Women's Coalition on Equal Opportunities) prefers not to associate with the state or pro-democracy politicians to maintain their identity as a feminist oppositional force, defining violence against women as a gender-based rights issue and pressuring the state and public through confrontational tactics such as demonstration rallies, protest marches and street performances (pp. 11–14). The author does not regard this difference as problematic, rather she asserts that this discrepancy in women's movements would add to 'the on-going construction and contestation of what feminism means' (p. 11) in Hong Kong.

4. Taking local and migrant domestic work as a case of transnational feminist solidarity, the author also demonstrates how feminism has been expanded to include women of different class, ethnic and national backgrounds and how feminist solidarity against exploitation and oppression in domestic work is closely related to struggles against power and domination in Hong Kong. In this process, feminism, the author argues, is not only 'an argument for recognizing the common experiences of women but an argument for recognizing common interests and a common context of struggle at a particular historical moment' (p. 126). The author maintains that the advocacy work for sex workers and domestic workers, in particular, has generated new terms and spaces through which feminism and feminist engagement can be reinterpreted.
5. Despite its merit, being original, well-researched and communicative, the definition of key terms such as feminism and the women's movement, yet repeatedly used, has not been discussed in a lucid way. The author has explained the differences between the women's movements and feminism (p. 15), based on Myra Marx Ferree's work.^[1] She sees that women's movements involve 'naming "women" as a constituency to be mobilized and building a strategy, organization and politics around issues defined as being particularly "women's" concerns' (p. 15). On the other hand, she has asserted that 'feminism is activism with the "goal" of "challenging and changing women's subordination to men"' (p. 15). Further, the author seems to use the two terms, women's movements and feminism, interchangeably without differentiation throughout the book. The author needs to more effectively address the subtle difference between the two terms. In addition, how the terms are defined and understood by women's activists in Hong Kong needs to be discussed in further detail. She repeatedly claims that feminism is a collective action frame but has not offered any details as to what would be major values and guiding principles in this frame.
6. I commend this book to feminist activists and scholars interested in understanding women's activism in non-western countries, as well as to keen readers of Hong Kong in general. This book assembles strong evidence to make the case that feminism is continuously constructed and renegotiated at the specific historical social context and serves as 'a collective action frame' for women's movements, often fragmented yet united for fighting against women's issues. In particular, given its unique geographical, historical and cultural situation, Hong Kong is the best site to explore the practice of transnational activism. I hope this book is a valuable addition for feminist activists to imagine a new future and create activism that goes beyond multiple presumed boundaries of class, gender, ethnicity and nationality and for feminist scholars to further reconsider and theorise transnational feminism.

Note

[1] Myra Marx Ferree, 'Globalisation and feminism: Opportunities and obstacles for activism in the global arena.' In *Global Feminism: Transnational Women's Activism, Organizing and Human Rights*, ed. Myra Marx Ferree and Aili Mari Tripp, New York and London: New York University Press, 2006, pp. 3–23.

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