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50 Years after Baodiao

How Hong Kong Struggled Against All Nationalisms

Baodiao's frontliners, activists, and historians

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November 11, 2021

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more problematic, right-wing militant elements to dominate the localist movement in recent years. But still, the left was even weaker.

Ultimately, the fifty years of political development since Baodiao represented the first major deepening of democratic values in a major city associated with China. No matter its weaknesses, compared to the many disruptions of democratic movements in China over the years, these fifty years of uninterrupted political growth will be recognized as an invaluable and hard-fought success for the entire legacy of Chinese democratic struggles. Today, the CCP must eradicate this legacy, because it recognizes that these democratic traditions represent too great of a threat. But we must not forget, Baodiao stands at the very beginning of these fifty years of Hong Kong's struggle for liberation.

that attachments to fascist or authoritarian regimes and agents dangerously keep our spirits enslaved?

ALY: Baodiao's key significance is that it was the first time a mass anti-colonial resistance in Hong Kong was able to develop outside of the CCP's influence. Even though the CCP's functionaries in Hong Kong were able to quickly adjust their strategy in the wake of Baodiao, infiltrating and taking over many leadership positions in HKFS, their gains were soon neutralized by the Gang of Four's collapse. After that, any youth that followed the CCP chose to do so not for ideological reasons, but for either personal gain, or agreeing with nationalism and authoritarianism. Since the 1980s, it has become very difficult for the CCP to establish a base with the youth of later generations. And thus, though the CCP was able to infiltrate and direct some operations in the HKFS briefly in the 1970s during Baodiao and the years after, it was keen to watch it decline (especially as it was torn apart by the internecine conflicts initiated by the likes of Chin Wan and other far-right localists in 2015)—because there was not much youth left willing to defend it.

On the other hand, it also became very rare for youth in the post-80s generations to embrace the left. Most young people who were politicized after the 1970s were influenced by the liberal pan-democrats—until the 2010s. In this historical overview, it's not difficult to understand Baodiao's historical significance: its unintended consequence was to become an important precursor to Hong Kong's localist political movement. After Baodiao, the general sentiment among the youth in the late 1970's was to downplay our long-time identification with mainland China and focus on local issues. This was at once a success and failure of the Baodiao movement. Success, because the 50s generation overturned the political thaw among generations of Hong Kong masses and served as the vanguard of Hong Kong localist politics; failure, because its liberal leaders of this generation developed very weak politics, unable to even defend the limited political principles of liberalism, and inevitably encouraging the rise of

Interviewer's note

Fifty years ago, in 1971, “Hongkongers”—then only an inchoate political and cultural identity, developed their first major mass movement. This is not to say that there were no mass struggles prior to 1971 in Hong Kong: Leung Po-lung's brief overview of political strikes in Hong Kong covers this history. But the “Baodiao” movement (保釣)—short-hand for “Protect Diaoyutai” (保釣) in Chinese—represents the first movement led by a generation of people in the city imbued with some inchoate sense of local consciousness (to which today's “Hongkonger” identity can be traced back), born and raised in Hong Kong upon the wave of mass migration from mainland China in the 1950s. The US-backed Japanese regime's recharged claim over Diaoyutai or the Senkaku Islands against Communist China and Kuomintang (KMT) Taiwan initiated a geopolitical conflict that ushered in a transnational wave of anti-imperialist activism that spread from the Chinese diaspora in the US to the youths of Hong Kong and Taiwan. While Chinese national interests and sentiments deeply pervaded many aspects of the movement, Baodiao in Hong Kong unleashed a generation of youth whose political disposition are not reducible to any national interests: for the first time, Hongkongers attempted to navigate through their own unique place in between various state powers, as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), KMT, and various independent elements vied for leadership. Many key stalwarts of post-Handover contemporary Hong Kong politics, from both the pan-democratic opposition to the pro-Beijing establishment, were Baodiao's student protesters.

Nearly fifty years later, Hongkongers built their largest and most powerful mass movement yet. I researched how grassroots activists negotiated power between different hegemonic actors during Baodiao for inspiration at the height of this movement in a feature piece on radical left collective and publication *70s Biweekly* (70保釣) at the height of the anti-extradition bill protests. Facing

the greatest setback for Hong Kong's democratic mass movement in generations today, I look again to Baodiao to mine the past's lessons in order to chart out possible guidance for an uncertain future. This piece does not aim to give a holistic and objective look at the various elements of Baodiao. It has a specific political agenda: Here I interview three Hongkongers whose lives have been touched by Baodiao—all of whom have spent their lives struggling *against* the nationalistic elements in 1971, thinking critically about what it means to articulate an autonomous political vision for and by Hongkongers.

Mok Chiu-yu (莫秋宇) is a libertarian socialist activist and artist, a co-founder of *70s Biweekly* that was a significant part of mobilizing the street actions during Baodiao. Law Wing-sang (羅永祥) is one of the most important scholars of Hong Kong left-wing and social movement histories today, whose long-time academic position at Lingnan was recently terminated as a part of an ongoing campaign of repression against critical scholars. Au Loong-yu (區龍宇) is a writer and labor activist, whose political awakening began during Baodiao as a teenager. I have combined their responses, collected separately, so that the reader can have a richer sense of how the experience, memory, and legacy of Baodiao overlapped and differed between respondents.

Au's comments were originally written in Chinese, and later translated by the interviewer. The interviews have been edited and condensed for clarity.

An interview with Baodiao's frontliners, activists, and historians

Promise Li: Each of you found Baodiao a formative experience for your political life—but at different points in time. Can you begin by telling us about your personal background leading up to the time

participants was drawn from the youth generation born in post-WWII Hong Kong; second, the traditional organized right-wing political groups and left-wing groups were not as dominant as in previous movements. Baodiao represented the emergence of local politics that were not determined by the KMT-CCP rivalry. Baodiao was a series of non-violent protests and demonstrations. It was a high watermark of the emergence of civil politics after the 1967 Riots. As a whole, it marked a significant shift turning away from the violent and sectarian protests of both the right-wing KMT or left-wing pro-CCP groups.

However, Baodiao's promise of deepening a whole generation's involvement in local grassroots organizing ultimately failed. In post-Handover Hong Kong, we can witness how many of the Baodiao leaders made use of their participation in the movement to gain personal political capital in joining the establishment. Baodiao gave them a license to prove their "patriotism." Of course, many Baodiao activists refused to join the elites' power play. Many of them were deeply frustrated but still some managed to reconnect their idealism developed in that era to other types of political and cultural work. Their stories deserved to be heard, to be critically examined and reflected upon. Their experience is an important part of the diverse genealogies of Hong Kong political culture.

MCY: Baodiao's success lies in awakening a local mass movement tethered to broader international issues related to China and the rest of the world. Looking back, there were also many elements that were not liberatory, especially those espousing nationalism and vanguardism of different sorts. Its populism ultimately failed to congeal into a sense of political clarity.

Baodiao's larger lesson is calling for us to revisit the basic question of what counts as meaningful political action at all. Mass movements—or parts of it—can have reactionary elements. How can we out-organize and resist them, emphasizing the human needs of togetherness and solidarity while understanding

ists, Trotskyists, and so on. The left soon became the weakest of these three main tendencies in Hong Kong politics. However, it is worth noting that during the Baodiao movement of 1971–2, the anarchists of *70s Biweekly* were able to most effectively mobilize militant youth action on the streets out of all factions, though their influence was quickly overshadowed.

MCY: Tuned to libertarian socialist ideas while experiencing Baodiao, I was holding onto a small group involved in the publication of short-lived magazines, reprinting and translating anarchist classics and new ideas from the likes of Alexander Berkman, Peter Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin, Murray Bookchin. I took the idea from the Situationists that one should do what one can on their own, and if one conceives a project that needs more than one person, then find partners to do the task together collectively. My work after Baodiao gradually became more culturally focused and my friends and I began doing radical street theaters, experimenting with various forms of political expression. Seeing bright students and people hoodwinked into supporting dead-end causes and ideas, I realized that education is important—and people would be better off with more libertarian models of pedagogy, like inquiry-based learning, rather than the brainwashing associated with colonial institutions. After experiencing the bickering and intolerance within Baodiao and later political groups and movements, I was convinced that the thorough transformation of society must incorporate cultural and psychological changes as well as political or economic ones. I continued to work on projects like “people’s theaters” and community music production where participants are invited to actively create their own artistic works.

PL: What do you think were the successes of the Baodiao movement? What were its failures? And what are its lessons today for Hong Kong?

LWS: Baodiao, as a movement, was an occasion for a confluence of multiple types of conflicts. The local implications for the mobilization processes were profound: First, a sizeable number of par-

of the movement, or how the movement contributed to your own politicization?

Mok Chiu-yu: Before going abroad for college, I was a high school student at a school in Hong Kong run by the colonial British government. Though our teachers talked about Japanese atrocities, I was curious why they never criticized those done by British colonial authorities. In the sixties, anti-Japanese sentiments, because of the memories of the war, were strong though we were witnessing the influx of Japanese consumer products and electronic goods as well as Japanese pop culture. Dissatisfied with the Hong Kong education system that we called “colonial slave education,” I persuaded my middle-class parents to send me to study in Australia (cheaper than the UK or the US and because I had some pen pals in Australia).

In this period of personal independence away from Hong Kong, I was exposed to professors and classmates who taught me about the student movements in Berkeley and other parts of the US. The movement deepened because of the Vietnam War, and Australia, as a younger brother of American imperialism, joined with US militarism. Australian students were recruited to join the war, and discussion on the war engulfed the campuses in Australia. I was one of the many students not happy with just burying myself in books and became involved in anti-war work, activism surrounding Aboriginal land rights, student union organizing, while I read deeply about the New Left and the likes of Martin Luther King Jr. and Che Guevara.

I was also part of that generation of 60s and 70s radicals who did not subscribe to capitalism or bureaucratic communism. The Cultural Revolution intrigued me, but I was not really sure what it was until I returned to Hong Kong, after meeting some ex-Red Guards who had fled to the city. Mao’s China certainly promoted nationalism, and the belief of supporting one’s own country no matter what sounded obnoxious to me. I was an internationalist by the time I left Australia and returned to my hometown.

Law Wing Sang: I have only a vague personal memory of the Baodiao movement since I was only a junior secondary school student then. But the effects of Baodiao lingered on in Hong Kong: I read about it from public and campus publications, like journals run by different university student bodies, cultural magazines such as *Panku* (XX), *Chinese Student Weekly* (XXXXXX). I later met people who were talking about it when I became a senior secondary student, which was also the time I had my political awakening. I saw Baodiao as a mythic representation of the high tide of student movements when I started my study in the university in the late 1970s—that was when the “Fiery Era” (XXX) of student activism was quickly passing away. In my first year of college at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), I joined a small group of ex-Maoists called “Big River Society” (XX). They organized a small study group to read classics by the likes of Karl Marx and Mao Zedong; some seniors also guided the juniors to read Althusser, Marcuse, and other New Left writings, which were not taught in the university courses.

I remember the organizing style of these post-Baodiao Maoist groups: With an emphasis on building “comradeship” among members, maintaining a family-like atmosphere, on top of coordinating efforts to run political campaigns. The seniors were eager to pass on experiences to the juniors, like how to campaign and run student union elections and publications, and organizing underground activities. Although the group did not function any longer by my second year, I still learned a lot from these seniors. In my last two years, I was elected as the Chief Editor of the Chinese University Student Press and the President of the CUHK Student Union. The student bodies then organized a number of activities to join the debates about Hong Kong’s future after 1997. Since then, some of the friends I met in Big River Society sought professional development in different fields; some worked as the core members of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers’ Union (HKPTU), which was compelled to disband recently.

ALY: The main subjects of Baodiao were composed of what I call the “50’s Generation”—the youth born and raised in Hong Kong in the 1950s. They later became the vanguard of Hong Kong social movements and politics. There are too many reasons for this to explain now, but basically, this generation took on a very different role than previous ones. Of course, Hong Kong social movement history did not begin with that generation, but the 1970s indeed gave rise to Hong Kong’s first mass movement independent of both the KMT and the CCP. More specifically, it began with the 1966 Star Ferry incident, but the energy of that youth movement was interrupted by the negative impact of the 1967 Riots, and took a few more years to be revived. The Baodiao movement represented a new era in Hong Kong politics. Since 1920, all major movements in Hong Kong have been either led by the KMT or the CCP, if not dominated by both elements. At first, both parties represented some form of an anti-colonial resistance movement for Hongkongers facing British oppression. But after 1949, the situation changed: By the 1970s, both parties’ political composition became fundamentally the same. Many young people noticed this at the time, so they became increasingly alienated by both parties, though the KMT suffered the worst slump in reputation.

When Baodiao started, the youth were like those of the 2019 anti-extradition bill movement—most were only newly politicized. Even some of the early sympathizers with Maoism, like many others on the streets at the time, felt that they needed to strike out on their own paths once the movement truly began. Thus, by the middle of the movement, we could already see clear ideological divisions. And a few years after that, youth and mass movement politics were divided into three factions: the Maoists, the liberals, and the leftists. Many of the Maoist youth later became the key founders and leaders of the pro-Beijing camp in post-Handover Hong Kong. Many in the liberal faction later became the cornerstone of the pan-democratic opposition. And the left developed into various smaller groups, like anarchists or libertarian social-

onization work. I heard about people from pro-CCP nationalists (囍囍囍) telling Hong Kong labor organizers to simply “wait to be liberated by the CCP.” In reality, the CCP was instructing those under its influence to bear their oppression, and just focus on recognizing and accommodating the CCP’s sovereignty over China. I only fully understood this key ideological difference between the nationalists and other young leftists around 1975, when I started working. By that point, it was easy for me to quickly choose a side, but not the liberals, because they were already disinterested in militant movement-building. The only option was this dwindling group of young leftists who were not swayed by CCP nationalism.

PL: Law, as one of the foremost researchers of Baodiao and Hong Kong left-wing and social movement history, how would you characterize your own relationship today with Baodiao, and how has this movement shaped your research trajectory and politics?

LWS: Baodiao contributed to the constitution of my political identity in my early years. Yet, over the years, I have distanced myself from the myth of Baodiao I once subscribed to. Collective reflection upon the complexity of Baodiao has never started; it remains to be consumed as the myth of “nationalist awakening,” etc. Not much effort has been paid to the interplay between idealism and power politics within and around Baodiao. Without such critical reflections and reviews, celebrating Baodiao uncritically will inevitably reify Baodiao as a myth that opportunistic actors can keep capitalizing on for their own purposes. But Baodiao still means a lot to me as it remains to be one of the most important reference points for my research and reflection upon the Hong Kong experience. Through contextualizing Baodiao, uncovering the silenced voices about Baodiao, we would know much better about the Hong Kong experience as well as our own political future.

PL: How did Baodiao shape and give rise to Hong Kong social movements and other local struggles in the years immediately after?

Au Loong-yu: When the Baodiao movement was happening in 1971, I was 14 years old, about to be in Form 2 of secondary school. I didn’t really notice the movement until the repression of the July 7th protests at Victoria Park, which caught my attention in the newspapers and led me to sympathize with the protestors and some of my earliest dislike of the police. The colonial regime’s daily actions provoked the most politically sensitive among the youth to build a movement against it. Even during primary school, I felt the oppressive pressure of the force-feeding and impoverishing colonial education system. On top of that, my father’s small business had failed, which left merchandise needing to be sold for us to get by. He sent me and my brother as hawkers to sell them at Sham Shui Po to make some money for the family, where I daily watched how the police would disrespect and oppress the small vendors for many days at that marketplace.

I guess that this type of colonial condition would sooner or later open up people’s hearts for the seeds of discontent, and the July 7th protests catalyzed the growth of these seeds. At the time I didn’t think of myself as wanting to “organize in politics” yet, but merely just feeling some vague sense of wanting to act against injustice. Not long after the events of July 7th, I read in the paper that the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) had just formed a Baodiao concern group for secondary school students, and so I immediately went and signed up. When I went to the first meeting, I realized that most of the organizers were older secondary school students (Form 5 or higher), and felt pretty nervous at first. By that point, the movement had grown quite a bit, and everyone was busy organizing protests and other programming. By 1972, the movement reached a low point, and everyone began debating about the future of the movement. I was there in one of those discussions, which was held during a picnic in a park, and remembered that everyone felt unsure about how to bounce back from the movement’s low point and internal differences. I didn’t really get these higher-level ideological discussions at the time, and felt

even more lost than the other student leaders. But from that point on, my life was changed. Soon after, I started pitching articles to a student magazine *Chinese Student Weekly*, critiquing aspects about my school and various members of its administration—my first attempt in sharpening my political questions.

PL: Insurgent pro-Chinese nationalism remained a key force in the Baodiao protests, but my understanding is that groups like *70s Biweekly* and other non-nationalist factions attempted to oppose these elements? What were the difficulties of such a task, and what were some tactics activists drew on to try promoting a non-nationalistic anti-imperialist component of the struggle?

MCY: I personally thought that the international student revolts of that era and other oppressed peoples' movements worldwide should be connected. Baodiao, of course, was a movement protecting the Chinese sovereignty of the Diaoyu Islands. and I was reluctant in joining a nationalistic movement. But my commitment to internationalism and my understanding of the world then was that the return of Okinawa and the other Ryukyus Islands to Japan was a collusion of American and Japanese imperialisms and should be resisted. So to me, the Baodiao movement was a part of a larger solidarity struggle against American imperialism and its allies. And when the British suppressed our demonstration from very early on, the movement began to have an anti-British thrust as well. We resorted to civil disobedience as a tactic, with repeated demonstrations deemed to be a violation of the public order ordinance enacted to control the pro-Beijing communist forces in Hong Kong in 1967.

The pro-Chinese nationalism faction of the movement used it to promote identification with Communist China and wanted to keep the Baodiao protests separated from being genuinely anti-colonial. It was a time when young people were growing up and were searching for an identity. The young people born after the war in Hong Kong have been growing up and most of them did not identify with the British, the colonizer or with the Chinese Communist regime.

I didn't pay much attention to the Chinese nationalists, even though I didn't realize at the time that they had already given up on decolonization work. I heard about people from pro-CCP nationalists (XXXX) telling Hong Kong labor organizers to simply 'wait to be liberated by the CCP.'

Chinese Student Weekly allowed me to follow in the tradition of the May Fourth movement and understand the value of democratic and scientific thinking, cleansing me of my colonial "mis-education." But after I graduated, I was beginning to feel dissatisfied with what I could learn from the publication on the social issues I cared about. Around 1972, I discovered *70s Biweekly*—whose members I found out were pivotal in organizing many of the Baodiao mobilizations just a few years ago—and that magazine was central in radicalizing me to the left. I cannot remember exactly which articles influenced me the most, nor did I fully understand all of their content then. But two things vividly stuck with me from the magazine. The first was a comic strip in one of its issues, illustrating a man who lost a feature of his face with each award or medal gained on his chest. I was afraid of becoming someone like this. The second was its 1971 issue, which I read afterward, reporting on the Bangladeshi independence struggle (called East Pakistan at the time, which was waging an anti-colonial struggle against the West Pakistan government which was backed by both the US and Chinese governments), and realizing that these problems I've noticed extend across the world.

I joined the anti-corruption movement against Peter Godber (then-Chief Superintendent of the Royal Hong Kong Police) in 1973, and also kept up with the "Four Antis" (XXXX) campaign against local structural inequity issues organized by Ng Chong-yin and other former *70s Biweekly* people in the following year. I didn't pay much attention to the Chinese nationalists, even though I didn't realize at the time that they had already given up on decol-

ment, among others. How did the Baodiao experience influence your own political development into the left?

ALY: I became a leftist after I graduated from secondary school, and only then did I begin to understand the influence of the Chinese nationalist elements and the ideological divisions within the Baodiao movement's left-wing. Some elders at the movement at the time showed me some articles from Wen Wei Po, talking about how many Chinese nationalists were skeptical of the movement at first, but were inspired to join en masse after seeing the youth protesters' militancy. They quickly tried co-opting the movement to steer many young people toward "learning about the Motherland," singing praises of Mao and the CCP. Even though the Communists' reputation was decimated in the public eye after the 1967 Riots, they continued to have some important mass base across the different social strata.

After Baodiao, they quickly harnessed their new gains from the movement to become the dominant ideological strain among the universities' student organizations. But they didn't attract me: Even though at first I had some hints of anti-colonial nationalist sentiments, I was always more interested in social issues and the problem of wealth inequality. Every time I came home from school, I had to pass by the piers at Mong Kok, seeing lots of poor "boat people" (船民), mothers holding their babies to beg for money. I remember these faces, and I keep asking why a society can treat its people like this. I later joined some other young activists (many later turned into nationalists) to do outreach to other poor and working-class folks in my neighborhood, and realized that there are many people even poorer than my family. I worked as a mover for a moving company after I graduated, and that was my first time seeing how rich people lived in their mansions. This made me even more determined to answer my questions about politics and society.

There was genuine dissatisfaction with British colonial rule, such as the 1966 Star Ferry protests and the 1967 riots (though both failed to gain mass popular support). Arriving back in Hong Kong in the late 60s, I helped found a youth biweekly publication and collective—*70s Biweekly*—made up of university students, graduates, and working youths. We were an amorphous group tied to the ideas of anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism, and socialist grassroots democracy. We eventually became more action-oriented, and so we organized, using the magazine as a point of contact and an organizing tool to build a movement to campaign for Chinese to become one of the city's official languages. That was in 1970 and there were mass meetings, discussions, but there were not really any demonstrations in the streets, not until February 1971 when an outdoor demonstration was held over the Diaoyutai issue.

The issue of sovereignty was first noticed by Chinese students (mostly from Hong Kong and Taiwan in those days) in America and they were interested in rallying all the Chinese in the world to support the protests against the collusion between Japan and the US. I remember that the first Hong Kongers who were connected with the students in America were teachers connected to the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and a poets' association. It did not take long for the *70s Biweekly* group to organize a Baodiao demonstration on February 20th, 1971. But it turned out that there was a pro-Beijing group that got wind of our plans, and wanting to take leadership, quickly organized a demonstration two days earlier. Baodiao subsequently developed into a movement with different political tendencies—including pro-Beijing factions who were able to dominate the university students' unions for a while. Most people in the *70s Biweekly* (calling themselves the "Baodiao United Front") was sober enough not to swallow Maoist propaganda and realized that socialism should be thoroughly anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, and anti-bureaucratic. Socialism came in many brands and some brands were like certain brands of milk powder—toxic and not fit for consumption.

Thus, the Baodiao movement—an amalgamation of nationalists, socialists of different shades, and liberal democrats—had a populist element and appeal. But it fizzled out by the end of 1972 and around that time, *70s Biweekly* had a split between the Trotskyists and the libertarian socialists. The former believed in setting up a new vanguard party and the latter rejected any kind of vanguardism. As a libertarian socialist influenced by its ideas of anti-statism, anti-nationalism, and ecosocialism, I later tried organizing around the position that Diaoyutai’s sovereignty belonged to no one but the birds, the fishes, and the turtles. There was some following around this reframing of the campaign, but no recognizable organized movement cohered around that idea.

LWS: Since the beginning, the nationalistic Maoists and the various non-nationalistic groups were competing with each other to shape the Baodiao movement. The non-nationalists tried every means to emphasize the Diaoyutai issue as a matter of anti-imperialism that should connect to other struggles, from other local fights to internationalist concerns. They also pushed to connect the use of police violence against protestors (most prominently at the July 7th, 1971 demonstration at Victoria Park) to connect issues of domestic police violence with broader anti-colonial politics.

Yet these efforts faced a lot of difficulties in setting a sustainable alternative agenda for Baodiao and Hong Kong, because nationalism was sharply prioritized by both the KMT right-wing and the pro-CCP factions. Hong Kong had long been a battleground for the KMT-CCP rivalry, and both of them were perpetuating their own versions of Chinese nationalism. Although the established organizations of both wings did not lead the protests, nationalism was still embraced by many people.

The leftists also faced difficulties because they did not organize around an effective program for a viable political alternative for Hong Kong’s future. Ng Chung-yin (鄧容), one of the main leaders of *70s Biweekly*, was baffled constantly by the question of what

Hong Kong’s future would look like after colonialism. Without an adequate answer around which the masses effectively organized, the anti-colonial sentiment was very soon appropriated by the Maoist groups. They provided the activists with a left-wing version of Chinese nationalism that fed on the CCP’s propaganda in the late Cultural Revolution period. The various “social actionist” tendencies picked up the activist work of the *70s Biweekly*—and yet many failed to carve out a coherent alternative to the same nationalist hegemony. The leftists had created a critical tension with the nationalist tendencies in Baodiao, but they had only a weak base to support their alternative agenda of anti-colonialism and internationalism.

In the 1990s, some Mainlanders started to pick up the issue of Baodiao; some of them issued a rallying call for “Baodiao of the ordinary people.” The pro-democrat groups tried to echo such demands, attempting to embarrass the CCP by reactivating Baodiao actions. The pro-CCP groups joined in quickly and the new Baodiao soon spiraled into a rivalry between pro-democracy groups and pro-CCP groups. This tendency moved further away from the internationalist agenda once promoted by the left in Hong Kong.

Baodiao politics of the 1970s and 1990s had a mix of motives. However, in the recent decade, the sovereignty of Diaoyutai became purely a pawn of international and regional politics. The state powers are the only players; claims of sovereignty have become purely a tool to mobilize for jingoistic nationalism. The past position of “Baodiao with an alternative agenda” becomes less and less possible to flourish. Hong Kong should learn the historical lessons of Baodiao by examining critically the contexts in which Baodiao broke out and transformed. Serious reflection upon the dangerous path of “critical Chinese nationalism” is badly needed.

PL: Au, you continued to be politically active after Baodiao for decades, organizing around Chinese labor solidarity and local Hong Kong workers’ issues through groups like Sun Miu (later renamed Pioneer Group), Globalization Monitor, Borderless Move-