

From Global Colonialism To Global Coloniality

: A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION. Hong Kong, March 21, 2012

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Introduction

One of the most enduring myths of the 20th century is that the eradication of colonial administrations has resulted in the decolonization of the world. This belief has led to yet another myth—that of a “postcolonial world.” Despite the fact that numerous “colonial administrations” have ended, a continuity of colonial forms of domination remains; forms which were

produced by cultures and structures within the modern/colonial capitalist world-system. In short, colonialism may have ended but not coloniality.

Inaugurated in January 2011, the Hong Kong Advanced Institute for Cross-Disciplinary Studies (HKAICS) aims to promote and articulate cross-disciplinary research as a way of advancing and enriching academic work on societal and global concerns through a more integrated approach. One of the Advanced Institute's primary research themes is "Coloniality and its Epistemological and Societal Consequences," which aims to promote insightful understanding of "colonial situations" and "coloniality without colonies" in the present period. This line of study is crucial not only to understanding the past and taking responsibility for the present, but also for conceiving of and implementing global futures beyond coloniality.

Consequently, the Advanced Institute organized its first exploratory workshop on "Coloniality and De-colonial Thinking" in the summer of 2011. Scholars from various countries, disciplines and institutions were invited to lead discussions on coloniality and de-colonial thinking, as well as to examine the construction and legacies of modern euro-centered epistemologies. The presentations and the exploratory discussions of the first workshop established the general framework for future exploration. It was decided that the focus of the second workshop should be more Asian-relevant,

benefiting from the rich and complex history, political, economic, artistic and intellectual landscape of Hong Kong.

The 1997 handover of Hong Kong marked the end of colonial British rule and the mutation of a city that now is promoted by its administration as a “World City of Asia and a Major City in China.” However, the “reunification” with China has resulted in a series of nervous breakdowns rather than in any glorious national form of integration. Today we are witnessing the emergence of a range of local identities in relation to the ongoing negotiations between China and the rest of the world, between the past and the present. The rise of populism in current political spheres and in public debates, along with the cosmopolitan imagination of Hong Kong, has coalesced into a dialectic of desire and fear as part of the process of becoming “Chinese.” Hong Kong’s singularity in the history of global colonialism affords it a similarly singular place in the logic of global coloniality.

To further understand both the colonial history of Hong Kong and its place in the global logic of coloniality, the Advanced Institute ran a pre-workshop roundtable on March 21 of 2012. The aim of this exercise was to examine the mobility and variability that colonial cultural forms have manifested in Hong Kong. Looking collectively at various Hong Kong case studies enables one to think not only about the past in the present, but about the distinct roads to the future that are available to Hong

Kong as part of the formation and transformation of civil and political societies.

Hong Kong-based scholars and researchers were invited to attend the roundtable and to share their insights on a series of issues. The roundtable started off by making a clear distinction between global colonialism and global coloniality. This distinction was the starting point for the ensuing discussions concerning factors and questions such as Hong Kong's relationship with mainland China; the place and role of Hong Kong in the power struggle over dewesternization and rewesternization; local histories and various forms of coloniality; and the role of knowledge and education in building global futures. Also examined was the relevance of dewesternizing nationalisms confronted with imperial globalism; the remaking of internal colonialism, both in dewesternizing and rewesternizing projects; the emergence of subaltern identities and cosmopolitan localisms; the reframing of "development" in East, South and South East Asia to promote economic growth vis a vis "development" in Western developed countries projected onto underdeveloped economies; and, as a consequence, the role of China and Western developed countries in their economic policies toward Africa and South America.

Throughout the discussions, a single recurring term became the anchor of the round table: "entanglement." This keyword enabled the workshop to enunciate concisely the complex nature

of world history and global coloniality in its Western versions, as well as its mutation into the current dispute of dewesternization, rewesternization and decoloniality.

Based on this consensus, a second workshop (June 7-8, 2012) was designed to explore pervasive issues of global coloniality within the setting of the “Asian Century,” a discourse appearing in tandem with the staggering growth of Asian economies. It was suggested that this “Asian Century” should be understood as “the return” rather than “the rise” of Asia. At the same time, cautious remarks were made as to whether this “return” should not be viewed as Asia taking over hegemony, or whether the return of Asia is contributing to the formation of a multi-polar world order. In this case, the return of Asia should be understood not as a race for planetary control that will take over the US and European Union, but rather as a move towards a more balanced world that is no longer based on unilateral decisions with immediately negative consequences for a significant percentage of the population.

It was also decided that these key questions would be addressed and further developed both in the second workshop and through position statements, which would serve to set the tone for future theoretical frameworks, and to envision “non-academic” and “innovative” projects that would create spaces and conditions within and outside Hong Kong for tackling issues related to coloniality. The present collection of

position statements, far from being a conclusion, is a starting point that should inspire the continuity of dialogues and reflections in Hong Kong as well as throughout the surrounding regions.