Precarious Labor and Political Identity of South Asian Platform Workers in Hong Kong

Emily Keren Li

Introduction

Amidst the rise of millions participating in what would be called the “revolution of our times” in 2019, students, workers, and activists in Hong Kong appeared to turn to an avenue of political struggle that had long felt stagnant: union activism. In the spirit of what Pauline Dibben would term a kind of ‘social movement unionism,’ over 500 petitions for new labor unions were filed in just two years after its beginnings, an unprecedented revival of unionism as a means of explicit political action against the backdrop of the anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill (ELAB) protests. After the implementation of the National Security Law in 2020, this budding politicisation of labor unrest suddenly felt the chilling effect of such a conclusion. In the three years in its wake, some of the largest independent unions in Hong Kong announced their disbandment, its pretext undoubtedly the heightening fear of political retaliation and a growing taboo around demonstrations. Yet, in November 2021, it is notable that food delivery platform workers for Foodpanda in Hong Kong launched a wildcat strike amidst this political climate. In particular, the ethnic compositions of the workers were of note, as they were predominantly South Asian.

Recent literature has covered the organizing strategy from the Foodpanda 2021-22 strikes (Chan, 2025), the working conditions of the platform economy (Chan, 2022), and the racialization of South Asian platform economy workers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Leung, 2022). Yet, I argue that an analysis of the role of ethnicity in Hong Kong’s platform labor struggle remains needed. Such conclusions have importance as they pertain to the future of platform organizing under precarious political conditions at large, the role of migrants in Hong Kong’s platform economy, as well as the potential for cross-racial organizing and solidarity between the working class in Hong Kong. The question then becomes: how can ethnic identity shape the possibility for collective struggle amongst South Asian platform workers in Hong Kong?

Due to safety concerns, research could not be conducted over the summer of 2025. In the hope of providing backing for future research, this project will unravel as a kind of large-form literature overview in three parts. Firstly, I will conduct a longitudinal history of politicised migrant labor in Hong Kong, from its colonial inception to its contemporary context. Secondly, I will identify the current context of platform capitalism and explore the working conditions of South Asian platform workers through the 2021-22 Foodpanda strikes. Finally, I will synthesize different methodological approaches to the struggle against platform workers, and argue for the necessity of a worker’s inquiry given the current political context of migrant workers organizing in Hong Kong.

A longitudinal history of migrant labor struggle in Hong Kong

Firstly, it should be noted that labor migration is and has been essential to the generous socio-economic development that Hong Kong has historically enjoyed. From blue-collar workers escaping political developments in China, to the importation of white-collar workers during the British colonial period, migrant labor importation in Hong Kong has seen various forms across class. Credit to Hong Kong's rise as a financial capital in the world is often given to immigration of skilled expatriates, international elites, attributed to the economic context of the mobility of capital within the liberalisation of international trade. (Manning, 2002)

"Migrant" here is thereby defined with some overlap to working class and minoritised identities in Hong Kong, and the changing nature of this term can be viewed overtime. This section will therefore seek to chart an alternative course of migrant labor struggle. Between migrant workers engaging in anti-colonial struggle to forming trade unions, this longitudinal history offers different snapshots of moments in Hong Kong's socio-economic development, legal proceedings, and labor history.

Early Chinese anti-colonial struggles (1844-1925)

In more recent years, recently translated English literature reveals a more incendiary history of working class migrant labor struggles during British Hong Kong's colonial era between the 1840-1960s, often undertaken by Han Chinese migrant workers on the lines of racial and class discrimination (Po-Lung, 2020). Long-term settlers from China have formed the majority of Hong Kong's population since its inception. Yet early-day working conditions under the British colonial government saw a working class predominantly composed of new migrants, no formal workers' organizations in Hong Kong, and a complete, instituted ban on the existence of labor unions at all.

The earliest known strike in Hong Kong occurred in 1844, just two years after the British occupation of 1842. Under the colonial government, a Population Registration Law had been instituted for all males under 21 to register, with a fee: five dollars for every British male, and one dollar for every Chinese. While this initially ruffled British bourgeois feathers, the colonial government mistakenly wrote that the Chinese would pay this fee every month, rather than yearly. Chinese laborers, who earned approximately two to three dollars per month at the time, immediately went on strike for three months. At the time, the working class had taken the lead of the British and Chinese bourgeoisie, who encouraged their workers to withhold work until amendments to remove this law for the privileged few making 500 dollars a year were passed into law.

Strikes continued to occur between 1861 and 1887, ranging from responding to the increasing taxes and prohibitions on rickshaw drivers and coolies to growing anticolonial sentiment as the French invaded Vietnam in 1884. Government crackdown was strict and violent: strike leaders were arrested, and a British Indian colonial officer had killed one person, injuring six others, a six-year-old child among them. Workers responded immediately with political strikes. Cargo workers, gas workers, rickshaw drivers, sanitation workers, porters, maintenance and dock workers employed a variety of repertoires such as refusing to service French battleships, rioting against the arrest of young protestors, and threatening to burn British and French areas if penalties were not lessened for the imprisoned. The Chinese bourgeoisie again played a role in calling for work to begin and for workers to back down from anti-British sentiment, where this time strikers focused their efforts solely on the French.

The British formally legalised trade unions in Hong Kong from 1920s onwards, with the caveat that they would be totally subject to "the full rigors of nineteenth-century judicial interpretations surrounding their activities." (Wilbur, 1992) In the meantime, the British Raj encouraged trading between the British territories during this period, and

Hong Kong saw an influx of Indian and Pakistani migrants who were recruited to serve in law enforcement. The government armed British Indian policemen with bayonets and rifles, introducing unprecedented laws that were purportedly targeted towards triads, but in practice could be used to prosecute any organization that "worked against the public order," including small-scale trade unions. Notably, the former law served as a precursor to the formation of Hong Kong's modern riot police, the Special Tactical Squad (STS) today.

Following the end of World War I, Hong Kong's recovering economy and steadying growth had struggled to reach the pockets of its working class. The Seamen's Strike of 1922 began on explicitly ethnic lines, as Chinese workers realised that European seamen were being paid up to 80% more for the same work. These workers, who often returned back to the mainland during many of these strikes, sought support and resources from the government in Guangzhou, increasing tensions between the colonial administration and the operation of the mainland. As Leung Po-lung notes, one can identify in nineteenth century strike history the uniquely transient status of migrant workers who were able to rely on this type of travel as a source of solidarity between both regions, amidst growing revolutionary and anti-imperialist sentiments in China.

The Canton-Hong Kong Strike and Boycott of 1925-26 further proved precisely how incendiary this solidaristic relationship could be. British troops had arrested and slaughtered protestors on May 30th in Shanghai, and Chinese people across all classes struck against the colonial establishment. Students, workers, and businesspeople continued to see through this struggle in Hong Kong, supported in strategy by trade unionists from Guangzhou. Among the demands of the striking workers, political demands included pleas for Chinese nationals to have the same rights as their British counterparts, the right to vote and be nominated to the city's legislative body, the right to free assembly, and the abolishment of racist laws that were often utilized to deport and mistreat specifically Chinese workers. The economic impact of some 250,000 workers returning to Guangzhou during this time was felt throughout the year of the strike, and yet the Chinese bourgeois eventually returned to work only a few months after against the wishes of those in the mass movement. Soon after, the colonial government passed the 1927 Illegal Strikes and Lockouts Ordinance, written with the express purpose of suppressing cross-sector work stoppages and the politicisation of strikes: from scrutinizing the links between trade unions and political organizations, to outlawing the use of union funds for political purposes, nor control by any overseas organization. (Chan, et. al, 2012) It should be noted that this law is still in effect to this day.

Trade unionism amidst industrialisation (1940s-1970s)

The post-war period appeared to urge the government to renew an interest in collaborating with the labor movement, as an era of relative stability in the late 1940s and 1950s paralleled Hong Kong's industrialisation. A new Trade Unions and Trade Disputes Ordinance was passed in 1948 to begin recording unions through registration procedures and regulating funding, again echoing the earlier 1927 Ordinance by restricting funds "for political purposes" as communist influence grew in Mainland China. In any case, this compulsory registration enjoyed a wave of increase in smaller-sized union membership between 1947 and 1952. Most of the 276 unions registered by 1951 were relatively low in numbers, with only three unions declaring a membership of over 5,000 workers. (Levin & Chiu, 1998) As this was happening parallel to the developments of the Chinese Civil War, the union federations Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (HKFTU) and the Kuomintang Hong Kong and Kowloon Trades Union Council (TUC) were both installed in 1948, respectively regarded as pro-Communist and pro-Nationalist political camps in the labor movement. (Kuah-Pearce, et. al, 2011) Notably, the former was registered as a "friendly society" rather than a union, bypassing the previous Ordinance that had forbidden political collaboration. Just a year after, the foundation of the People's Republic of China led to the Beijing government concretizing regulations around the free flow of

immigration between its borders and the British administration, stifling the flow of workers and immigration from the Mainland.

While Hong Kong began to suffer a labor shortage and a heightening cost of living at the start of the 1960s, industrial relations in the 1950 to 1960s reflected a fascinating decline in both the level of strikes and the propensity of striking (Leung, et. al, 1991). Over this time, the political rivalry between the HKFTU and TUC had intensified. Workers now began to ally themselves with one political camp or the other, and by 1956, about 70 per cent of the workers' unions were affiliated to either one of the two aforementioned federations. The strength of an independent labor movement in Hong Kong seemed altogether sapped. The involvement of labor unions in strikes overall had declined, and union membership experienced a notable drop. Established unions appeared to employ less militant tactics across the board, as employers easily appeased their striking workers with increased wages. Researcher Joe England attributes this to the HKFTU's 'desire to maintain the economic stability of Hong Kong from which China derived a substantial proportion of her foreign exchange.' (England, 1989) Literature also shows that their motivations may have diversified, in the sense that trade unions now had a larger objective than materially supporting their membership – perhaps they were interested in boosting their own political statuses, as militant industrial action may not have been regarded as the most effective way of winning the public's support and garnering political status.

Amid industrial peace in the region, the rising revolutionary sentiments from the 1967 Cultural Revolution would spill over into Hong Kong's year-long anti-colonial riots in 1967. Factory workers at Artificial Flower Works went on strike on May 1st, and 'big character' posters were put up publicly condemning colonial British authorities and the collusion of the Hong Kong government at the time. On May 12th, pro-Communist union leaders and cadres within the HKFTU were politically steadfast in organizing general strikes among the population, with some 18 strikes taking place. The HKFTU escalated ongoing labor disputes with dockworkers, public and civil service workers, and textiles factories, further urging Hong Kong leftists to resist British imperialism in boycotting participation in the colonial government structure altogether. The following month saw citywide work stoppages among hawkers and transport workers, and the Seamen's Union rose again. Yet demonstrators, workers, and students increasingly clashed with police as political unrest heightened, and workers in Hong Kong had begun to grow disenchanted with the perceived violence of these fiercely ideological trade union organizations. (Mung, 2022) Leftists did not hold a strategic or hegemonic position among the general population, nor trade unionists overall. Many of Hong Kong's public had not gathered in mass support, but rather anxiety, among them being Chinese migrants who had fled from the Mainland to Hong Kong in recent years. And so the struggle eventually subsided in October of the same year, when directives from Beijing's Zhou Enlai finally ordered leftists in Hong Kong to finally end their strike, at once quelling what seemed to be one last politically militant hurrah in this period of Hong Kong's anti-colonial labor struggles.

In this historical period, we can first identify how ethnic tensions between European and Chinese workers found themselves at the center of many of these struggles, often in relation to the political context of the early colonial government. I argue that these Chinese workers' transient migrant status also inadvertently supported many of these struggles, in the sense that Chinese workers often sought refuge in the mainland and established solidaristic connections with anti-imperialist unionists in the Mainland as the revolution had reached China. The enactment of strict laws during the colonial era, enforced on the ground by other migrant workers who served as law enforcement, therefore set legalistic foundations in creating difficult conditions for contemporary political unionism in Hong Kong. All the while, Chinese workers of this time period also were migrants experiencing socio-political upheaval and intensified labor strife, even as unions remained industrially docile – especially in the post-1967 period, where they could be regarded as agitational and ideological amidst the political regime change in the Mainland.

The changing relationship between Mainland China and Hong Kong therefore becomes pertinent in the question of Hong Kong's working class and the implications of the "migrant" classification. While 40% of the total population of Hong Kong at this time was technically born outside of the territory, the largely Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong people were still tightly integrated with Chinese economy, society, and politics during this time. One might not identify this as immediately "foreign," as Skelon tellingly uses his analysis of labor migration to Hong Kong (1996).

Migrant worker unionism in the post-industrial era (1970s-1997)

Labor reform was immediate in the aftermath of the 1967 riots. In the period prior to the 1967 riots paralleled the heightened government intervention in unionism during the mid-1950s, labor data showed a significant increase in the prosecution and deregistration of a number of trade unions. (Leung, et. al, 1991) Tellingly, the colonial government appeared to back down from this aggressive approach almost completely from 1970 onwards. New divisions were formed under the Labor Department, and the Labour government overseas in the UK had taken notice, introducing Labour Tribunals and other settlement procedures in 1973 in an effort to legitimise itself favorably in the eyes of the Hong Kong people before the territory's 1997 handover to China.

At the same time, political strife had slowed. Economic development was abundant, and Hong Kong's economy was to become especially sophisticated in the coming years, experiencing generous growth in the 1970s as it emerged as a leading Newly Industrialised Economy (NIE) in East Asia. The average worker in Hong Kong was now generally more economically affluent, geographically stagnant, and governmentally supported – despite a growing narrowing in income between either, blue-collar industrial class workers and white-collar workers were enjoying visible improvements in their standard of living. (Ng, Sek Hong, et. al, 2007) Since the late 1960s, white-collar trade union organization had grown popular among local teachers, civil servants, medical staff, and social workers, as well as the development of labor organizations and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that assisted workers in organising their own trade unions. While Hong Kong's workforce remained a largely Han Chinese migrant one that constituted long-term settlers, the labor market began to transform itself into that of an importer of net labor.

Hong Kong's post-war success therefore paralleled the explosion of labor exportation from a new class of migrant laborers from predominantly countries in the Global South, namely South and Southeast Asia. "Unskilled" labor from across national borders in the mid-1980s became a much more significant feature of economic development in the rapidly industrialising region. (Manning, 1992)

In particular, the Philippine government under Ferdinand Marcos had pushed large-scale labor migration incentives through the establishment of the Overseas Employment Program that benefited Hong Kong's emerging middle class that was in need of domestic work to support their two-family homes. This development undoubtedly marked the emergence of an entire temporary migration industry in the Philippines, as well as new forms of transnational control over its overseas workers, who grew to become the largest exporters of labor to Hong Kong to date. At the same time, Hong Kong labor policies did little to address this rapidly growing population, nor the structural marginalisation and racial discrimination evident in the industry of domestic work: a type of informal, unorganised work that took place in the home with little restrictions. (Constable, 1997) The formation of political organizations and community organizations therefore grew in tandem with the increase of Filipino migrant domestic workers to Hong Kong, primarily addressing and coalescing the needs of workers through means of providing welfare and assistance.

It was precisely in the context of the proposal of Executive Order 857, a mandate from the Marcos regime that obliged overseas Filipino workers to remit 50 percent of their earnings through Filipino

banks in 1982, that migrant domestic worker activism had incensed into forms of public resistance. Previous community organizations now came together to form the basis of a coalition that represented almost two-thirds of all Filipino domestic workers at the time, the United Filipinos Against Forced Remittance. (Fan 1988) The pressure group campaigned heavily throughout the 1980s and 1990s, organizing public rallies, marches, and petitioning the government through high profile actions against the amount. While these marches varied in popularity among other workers and often avoided political repertoires that were viewed as militant such as strike action, a fair amount of traction and influence from global criticism of the Marcos government saw success in such political efforts as the controversial order was officially lifted in 1985. Domestic workers from Indonesia, Thailand, India, and Sri Lanka were also among the nationalities of migrants that participated in the protests, and these workers engaged in coalitional organizing, forming NGO networks and migrant groups like the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body and the Coalition for Migrant Rights in the late 1990s. (Constable, 2017)

Compared to other countries in the Global North, it can be said that Hong Kong became a "hotspot" for migrant activism during this historical period – much to the "political apathy" of locals, as one Filipina organizer described. (Rother, et. al, 2012) As some researchers have theorised, this could be attributed to the preservation of Hong Kong's labor rights, as well as a societal context in which the rule of law generally allows for a higher level of tolerance for trade unionism at large. (Choudry, et. al, 2016) Specifically, Article 24 of the Hong Kong Basic Law states that residents of Hong Kong "shall include permanent residents and non-permanent residents"- meaning, migrant workers and domestic workers qualify for this status, and as such have the right to join trade unions.

During this period, Hong Kong's economic growth under its neoliberal capitalist structure gave rise to an era of little political strife amongst its Han Chinese population. At the same time, the growing wave of the globalisation of "unskilled" labor gave rise to a new class of workers in Hong Kong, predominantly non-Chinese, female domestic workers from the Philippines. Informed by little formal restrictions on domestic work, as well as pushed by the domestic unrest from Marcos' labor migration schemes, NGOs, community organizations, and coalitional organizing informed a vibrant migrant worker activism scene that was able to push for change for transnational struggles.

Domestic migrant work in the neoliberal era (1998 - 2014)

As a holdover from the colonial government's benevolence, workers in Hong Kong at the height of the 1997 Handover continued to enjoy the right to strike and form their own independent trade unions, despite their changing status as a Special Administrative Region under China**.** Hong Kong enjoyed a new status as a neoliberal experiment, assuming democratic government structure and opening their economies. Trade unionism would therefore take on a greater role in legislative politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s as the aforementioned HKFTU and the newly founded Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) of 1990 established a formal presence in the Legislative Council, Hong Kong's principal legislative body. (Chan, et. al, 2012) These two labor groups historically continued to be in political contention with one another.

At the helm of the HKCTU was Lee Cheuk-yan – a previous student activist who held explicitly pro-democracy views. Lee pushed to win a seat in electoral politics in 1995 and was credited with legislating labor rights leading up to the Handover period, among other critical labor laws that honored collective bargaining and organizing rights. At the other side of the table, the HKFTU had positioned itself in opposition to the growing pro-democracy camp, allying with the post-Handover government in continuing to roll back several pre-handover labor rights laws. Adversely, their control over the majority-Beijing Provisional Legislative Council that was overseeing post-Handover legislation at the time had introduced rules on voter eligibility, disenfranchising approximately 800,000 workers

leading up to the first elections in 1998. (Leutner, et al., 2015)

At the same time, 1998 and 1999 also marked the formal establishment of many independent unions, including the Filipino Migrant Worker Union and the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union respectively. Given Lee's activist tendencies, both unions were able to affiliate with the HKCTU. These migrant labor unions offered a variety of services to their members, from language learning and legal assistance to organising advocacy and awareness campaigns in collaboration with other NGOs and migrant organizations. It is important to note that the challenge of migrant labor here is that the nature of their work as individuals, often under different households and different contracts, makes collective bargaining fundamentally difficult. That is to say that to bargain for these unions would be to bargain sectorally, a difficult task given both unions' relatively low representation among the larger migrant worker population. This was also reflected in the unions' dwindling membership, which was attributed by some organisers to the transient and temporary nature of much migrant work. (Choudry, et al., 2016)

While Hong Kong experienced a period of stagnation in union membership rates at this time, migrant workers were beginning to take to the streets in public action, advocating for economic demands. Pockets of migrant domestic worker struggle appeared in the early 2000s, as the IMWU staged a protest against exploitation by employers and recruitment agencies in 2001, the first organised protest of Indonesian domestic workers to ever take place in Hong Kong. Remarkably, the rally was regarded by a researcher as "something which has never happened in Indonesian itself." (Constable, 2009) There is something unique about this form of transnational resistance, one in which, despite repressive conditions back home, migrant workers are able to make their struggle visible in Hong Kong.
There were political strikes undertaken by domestic workers too, during this time period. The anti-World Trade Organization protests of 2005 and 2006 also saw migrant workers in Hong Kong marching against the WTO's role in neoliberal globalization that had affected their homelands. Alongside the HKCTU, Filipinos, Indonesians, Thais, and South Korean farm workers came together in a series of marches to represent a broader faction of those who identified with the role of the WTO in the growing poverty of the Global South. The demonstration also served as a space for migrant workers to protest the imposition of a levy and increased visa fees. Notably, predominantly Han Chinese domestic workers of the Hong Kong Local Domestic Workers General Union also joined migrant domestic workers in several rallies during this year, expressing solidarity with other workers despite the "fragile class solidarity" that some researchers attributed to Han Chinese domestic workers feeling threatened by rising competition in their industry. (Constable, 2017)

In the meantime, the HKCTU struggled to find its place as an institutional union with little political presence, even within its alliance with the pan-democratic parties of the Legislative Council. While students, youth, and social movement groups staged a strike against government plans to relocate "iconic symbols of Hong Kong heritage" in 2006, the budding of a new pro-Hong Kong independence, national movement of "localism" in Hong Kong revealed divisive interests between those and the union workers under the HKCTU who saw little connection with the labor movement at large. Yet, leading up to the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2019 anti-ELAB protests, the issue of identity among the Hong Kong people in relation to a skepticism of China would not only continue to grow amongst the youth, but also minority communities in Hong Kong.

Changing national identity and social movement unionism (2014-2019)

The culture of "social movement unionism" in Hong Kong had since awakened- I refer here to Pauline Dibben's theory of social movement unionism as it pertains to the Global North, a fight that is not about "fighting for its own sake" but "protecting the weakest in society from the worst excesses of capitalism." (Chan, et al., 2023) Hong Kong's recent social unrest has little formal data available on the participation of migrant workers. For the purposes of

this section, broader discussion will incorporate the context of available data on ethnic minorities' (ENMs) attitudes to political unrest in Hong Kong.

The 2014 Umbrella Movement was Hong Kong's first big upset in this new era of politicisation. Amidst the leaderless groups that had come together to occupy Hong Kong's central financial district in a 79-day struggle, the demands they echoed were less material than they were idealistic, abstract: protestors were calling into question the lack of democracy under China, universal suffrage, and political freedom. Instead, a resentment of Mainland Chinese tourism and new immigration underpinned the new localist movement that paralleled the Umbrella Movement, embodying a xenophobic and populist politics. Since the movement was embedded in a rugged sense of individualism akin to the Occupy movement taking place abroad, this general distrust for institution and hierarchy also disregarded union leaders like Lee as opportunists. Even so, Indian social worker-activist Jeffrey Andrews was among many other ENMs who had gathered on the night of September 28th to occupy the streets for democracy with banners that read "Hong Kong is our home, we ethnic minorities strive for democracy." (Iyengar, 2014)

It is important to take a moment here to discuss the term ENM in relation to migrant identity. Migrant workers of Hong Kong often overlap with this population, since the Hong Kong government classifies ENMs as all non-Chinese members of a population, regardless of being native-born or a Chinese immigrant.The number of ENMs rose from 6.4% in 2011 to 8.4% in 2021 at an increase of 37%. The main ethnic groups in Hong Kong are respectively categorised as Indonesians, Filipinos, Whites, Indians, Pakistanis, Nepalese, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankans, Japanese, Thais, and Koreans. Yet ENMs are not a monolithic group, as the term would imply- additionally, further clarification is needed on the distinction amongst ethnic minorities between citizenship holders, permanent residents, and asylum seekers. This category does not necessarily account for the structural marginalisation, differences between groups who have more long-term lineage in the city, and racism embedded in Hong Kong society. Of note is the particularly stark difference in poverty rates and economic status between, say, populations of Whites in comparison to South Asians. Compared to the whole population, South Asians, Indonesians, and Thais have higher poverty rates at 19.4%, with South Asians representing the poorest minority group of the population. (Kennedy, et al., 2023)

Andrews, who later campaigned to become the first Legislative Council member of non-Chinese descent, explained that young minoritised communities, especially South Asians, shared similar localist ideas of nationality leading up to the 2019 anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill protests. In particular, one racist rumor that had spread about minoritised communities' involvement in allegedly beating up a frontline protestor was quickly rebuked when ENMs distributed water bottles outside the Chungking Mansions the next day, a known gathering space for ENM community and refugees. Stories like these were reported heavily by Chinese and English pro-democracy media, who sought to portray these communities' public engagement as "heroic." Reports online populated with similar rhetoric from ENMs themselves, with one participant having quoted "the protest movement has made [me] feel truly part of the city for the first time, after suffering discrimination all [my life.]" Generally, younger ENMs who were interviewed during 2019 identified more with Hong Kong than their heritage countries, and generally supported the movement. Furthermore, Bhowmik identifies how younger ENMs believed that supporting the movement could align them closer to a sense of belonging as a "Hongkonger," while many of the older participants believed that it would minoritise them further in society, becoming "scapegoats," an experience that felt familiar to many. (Bhowmik, et al., 2022)

While 2014 had felt more abstract in its ideals, the anti-ELAB protests in 2019 also saw a notable shift in organisational strategy towards unionization in popular society. Workers filed for over 500 new unions in the next two years, signaling an unprecedented revival of unionism on the large part of Hong Kong society as a means of explicit political expression. There was an increase in organizing industries with young and informal workers, from accounting to architecture and design. (Chan, et al., 2023) This organizing was predicated on a more

political context, with the aim of creating solidarity and public pressure on the pro-Beijing government rather than fighting for simply economic reforms. Against the backdrop of the ongoing anti-ELAB movement, calls for general strikes were also common that were again non-economic in nature. Responding to police violence and the death of protestor Alex Chow, these calls for general strikes were successful and generally supported by the public, where organizer's estimates show that approximately 350,000 people could go on strike at once, with the potential to impact key industries as flights were canceled in the hundreds. However, a literature overview shows that more research is needed to understand the involvement and participation of ENM community organisations, migrant groups, and migrant unions during this time: while we can identify many foreign domestic migrant worker struggles prior to 2019, it is difficult to gather data on any political participation of the anti-ELAB movement.

2019 was a watershed moment for the city's political unionism. Yet, the "chilling effect" of the implementation of the National Security Law (NSL) would see many trade unions in Hong Kong disband between 2021 and 2023 under growing political pressure, including notably large independent unions such as the aforementioned HKCTU and the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, the latter of which resulting in a reduction of total trade union membership in Hong Kong by one-sixth. (Chan, et al., 2023) Businesses have since targeted local labor unions with less collective bargaining power under these conditions, and the imposition of government programmes importing foreign workers have further highlighted anxieties from unemployed locals. (Mung, 2024)

In the aftermath of the 2014 and 2019 movements, I argue that the definition of national identity among local Chinese shifted in the face of Hong Kong's nascent "localist" movement. While Hong Kong has always been a city of migrants, a cleavage revealed itself between those who identified with Mainland China and those who did not. Racist discourses of ENMs also turned into heroic stories that were popularised by pro-democracy media. Despite the structural marginalisation that many ENMs face, the younger generations also found a new sense of belonging and identity through shared political struggle over 2019.

The rise of platform capitalism in Hong Kong

"A race to the bottom:" Platform working conditions

It is in this particular 'post-union' context of Hong Kong that we find ourselves in the explosion of the platform economy. Undoubtedly, the work of food couriers, drivers, and shelter carers has proliferated globally, and is equally reflected in Hong Kong, with the number of Uber riders growing by nearly forty times just between 2014 and 2019. As a new model of labor emerging out of the gig economy, a type of precarious work, platform work is thereby defined here as on-demand labor activities mediated by digital platforms on both local and global bases. (Au-Yeung, et al., 2024) While platform capitalism is often framed as a positive innovation in capitalist society, Marx denotes that the introduction of new technology also appears as a response on behalf of capital to the working-class struggle. The capitalist class therefore harnesses and develops this digital technology to produce more capital at the risk of poor working conditions.

Literature has shown that platform employment is particularly precarious in that it conveniently falls outside of the purview of traditional jobs covered by existing labor legislation in Hong Kong, even more so than domestic work. This is worrisome in that the working conditions are particularly precarious, as the industry is newer and the nature of employment often falls into a legal gray area. As such, platform companies do not maintain formal employment relationships with their workers, instead relying on a nebulous legal status the International Labor Organization terms as "dependent self-employment:" an easy way for employers to avoid offering traditional protections such as paid leave, work injury insurance, and minimum wage. Like many countries across the world, typical affordances from occupational welfare, statutory benefits such as paid sick leave are thus not covered for platform workers under Hong Kong's current Employment Ordinance.

"Being your own boss" with flexible working hours is often touted as a benefit of this line of work, a kind of mythology a part of the incentives offered by platform work. Yet the method of calculation itself for payment is notoriously private. For example, despite publishing open data on a kind of loose payment formula, factors such as "demand" and "distance travelled" are still calculated privately, and thus completely opaque to workers. Striking Hong Kong Foodpanda workers in 2021 were able to gain clarity from the company who then conceded that the algorithm used was often adjusted to match supply and demand – something that these companies ultimately have unilateral decision making over. (Chan, 2025)

The platform also offloads hidden business costs to their workers, including but not limited to fees for vehicle maintenance, fuel, charging, and parking fines. In some instances, interviews with workers in Hong Kong verify that even company-branded merchandise is bought from the workers' pockets. This is not to mention the lack of compensation for other factors such as waiting time, which contributes to an instability in income that can create an unhealthy dynamic which incentivizes workers to accept as many orders as possible to make up the difference. Despite the precarity, many food delivery workers who were interviewed also relegate this to the ability to accept or reject an order.

It is under this mythological framework that "the illusion of agency" is created among workers, while the design of these digital platforms incentivize delivery workers to work long, intense hours dictated by gamified algorithms with opaque standards. The instrumentalisation of technology through platforms like Foodpanda and Deliveroo are designed to maximise profits for the platforms and deliberately mystify its labor processes, between the payment algorithms and the collection of data of workers. Workers are nudged to accept new tasks. Frequent warnings issued by the platform or disciplinary actions are common occurrences among almost 30% of those surveyed, and tactics like account suspension

and termination are frequently invoked to control worker behaviour. (Recent literature expands on how these platforms deploy design-based techniques in their algorithmic management to reshape the very architecture of workers' choices. That is to say that platforms in themselves architect what options are available to workers, and how they are presented, thereby restricting workers' agency. This architecture is defined as "the culmination of design decisions within a platform." For example, while Foodpanda previously offered immediate communication between riders and Foodpanda's operations team, an in-app "self-service tool" for opening asynchronous tickets replaced this measure after 2019. (Chan, 2025)

The occupational risks in the nature of delivery work gives way to higher rates of traffic incidents with mystified insurance coverage provided by the leading platforms in Hong Kong. Recent surveys show that more than 1 in 4 food delivery workers interviewed in Hong Kong claimed that they had experienced an accident while working, paralleling the 30% increase in traffic accidents involving motorcycles and bicycles in 2020 as reported by the Hong Kong Transport Department. (Chan, et al., 2022) While food delivery platforms such as Deliveroo and Foodpanda provide general insurance coverage to their workers, their rates are comparatively similar to the coverage provided should workers apply to the Traffic Accident Victims Assistance (TAVA) fund, overseen by the city's Social Welfare Department. In practice, the process of claiming company insurance is cited as difficult to navigate for workers, and if a worker claims their company's insurance, they must pay back to TAVA the amount claimed, effectively externalising these costs to the government. (Ming, et al., 2025)

All the while, a trend of steadying decline in wages can be observed over time in studies corroborating qualitative interviews from food delivery workers in Hong Kong. Food delivery platforms are engaging in a "race to the bottom" in worker's fees, as large platforms transitioned from traditional employment contracts to hourly rates from 2014 to 2016, further degrading into self-employment contracts based on piece rates from 2018 to 2020.

The concern around platform working conditions have therefore given rise to more disputes, protests, and demonstrations taken on by those in the industry. There has been little legislative moment on this issue. Hong Kong's Labour Department pushed back on growing concerns around legislating so-called self-employment in 2018, with no plans to expand legislation at all, instead claiming that this type of approach may be "counterproductive." Instead, the Department called for non-legislative approaches such as increasing education, offering quasi-bargaining worker consultation services, and increasing inspections.

The chilling effect of Hong Kong's post-union context is also of particular note when it comes to resistance against the growing precarity of platform working conditions. Trade union membership is not common among platform economy workers, and especially low after the disbandment of the two largest trade union federations in 2019. Many labor non-governmental organizations and political pressure groups outside of the formal establishment have therefore taken up an important role in lobbying for, connecting with, and organizing delivery workers in the labor scene. Of note is the Rider's Concern Group, an offshoot of the aforementioned Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee with strong social justice organizing ties in Hong Kong that had actively organized many different strikes from 2021-2025, who abruptly ceased operations as recently as July of this year. Interestingly, this follows an opinion piece featured in the Hong Kong Economic Journal posted a few days before this on June 27th, that inferred that lawmakers had been explicitly warned not to discuss delivery workers' rights. (Lee, 2025) These developments are as timely as this year, and are likely to continue altering the organizing context and affecting the propensity of workers to take political action.

"A beggar's choice:" Racialisation and migrant workers

More recent literature has highlighted the intersection between platform labor and migrant identity globally: "platform labor is predominantly migrant labor." (Bonhomme, et al., 2024) Non-standard jobs, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with employment context in these host countries present barriers to entry for the vast majority of migrants entering labor markets worldwide. Elements of platform work's so-called "self-employment" scheme are therefore precisely the kind of affordances that attract such a positionality: a straightforward onboarding process, freedom, flexibility, and autonomy. This low barrier for entry into platform work, coupled with the large and flexible pool of migrant workers makes these two variables overlap: where the supply side of these platforms are only able to consistently meet demands of their customer base with the influx of migrant labor.

Notably, there is a significant lack of official statistics on the ethnic composition of platform workers in Hong Kong, yet mostly male South Asian residents have been in the trade and are largely the demographics of multiple studies conducted on the topic of food delivery platform workers in Hong Kong so far. Little data is collected about the specific immigration status of many of these workers- in one recent survey from 2025, the large majority of the participants interviewed identified as Chinese-born in Hong Kong. This reflects a greater gap in large scale research needed specifically of ENM food delivery workers.

For the purposes of this study, South Asians will be defined in accordance with the Hong Kong Census' categories, which include Bangladeshis, Indians, Nepalese, Pakistanis, and Sri-Lankans. However, many Indians and Pakistanis have multiple generations in Hong Kong as a result of law enforcement recruitment during the British Raj, as well as encouraged trading between British territories during the colonial period. This may explain why within the 'South Asian' grouping, Indians are represented more broadly across different backgrounds, from professional to elite, whereas more Pakistanis and Nepalese than Chinese are represented in 'elementary occupations,' and employed in jobs under the category 'Miscellaneous social and personal services' sector, including 'unskilled jobs' or 'sales.' A survey conducted of South Asian food delivery workers in Hong Kong reveals a relative preference for food delivery over jobs in security and construction, but framed as a "beggar's choice," perhaps due to racial stereotyping in the standard employment process. While a quarter of the interviewees had bachelor's degrees, most had faced an unemployment period before turning to food delivery. Despite this, food delivery is still seen by some interviewees as an escape from 'elementary' jobs, subverting the racist assumption of South Asians in Hong Kong typically working in construction or logistics.

Literature on the racialisation of the largely migrant population of platform workers is growing, but still limited. Gebrial (2022) theorizes that the process of racialisation construes migrants as "disposable, dangerous, and less human." Gebrial explains this through three factors in the platform industry respectively: the lack of protections as afforded by their employment misclassification, the racial stigmatisation of drivers as "brown," and the strict forms of surveillance that come from such socio-cultural forces. In addition, female food delivery workers can be subject to sexual harassment on the job, and female migrant workers outside of this industry who engage in feminised labor such as domestic work and care work can face even lower incomes than their male counterparts, exacerbating the experience of both class and gender oppression.

The COVID-19 pandemic also saw how much this process of racialisation directly affected South Asian workers in Hong Kong, resulting in a 'visibilization' in the media. Demand for online food delivery services skyrocketed this time, yet research over January 2021 shows a racial bias in local news reporting around the city's cases of infection within South Asian communities. Textual analysis of these cases tended to invoke negative keywords related to hygiene, 'poor', 'bad,' 'dirty,' and 'smelly,' associating South Asians with specific geographic districts. Around the world, research has shown how panic about hygiene and the transmission of coronavirus is manifested onto working-class communities, those who would be more prone to infection as a result of a lack of resources, living conditions, and structural marginalisation. Comments

and reviews were thereby left on platform apps like Deliveroo demanding "no South Asian food riders," contributing to a platformed, racialized discourse of South Asian ethnicities online. (Leung, 2022) And the architecture of these platforms heavily favor the customer being right- while Deliveroo was quick to respond by banning customers who left racist remarks, it is interesting here that these platform-mediated structures of employment can only facilitate reactive policy in response to racist incidents with workers taking place. Leung therefore theorizes here a discourse of media 'visiblisation,' where previously 'invisibilized' racial minority labor taken on by the proletariat in their host societies is made visible in a moment of contradiction. (Marx, 1867)

Tactical 'visibilization' in the 2021-22 Foodpanda strikes

The 2021-2022 Foodpanda delivery workers strikes therefore served as a spontaneous, workers' struggle carried out by South Asian workers: a tactical, worker-led instrumentalisation of the 'visibilization' of platform work.

In 2021, more than 300 delivery workers for one of Hong Kong's leading food delivery platforms, Foodpanda, went on a two-day strike from November 13 to 14. Among many grievances, dwindling pay, harsh working conditions, arbitrary account suspensions, and a lack of efficient communication channels to share these concerns with Foodpanda management were just some of the issues that the strikers had cited. The demands the couriers made were thus primarily economic, and called for a base pay raise, an end to cash-on-delivery, delivery fee cut reversal. Other requests raised related to the structure of the Foodpanda app, particularly around redesigning certain features of the digital platform. From a new map system to changes in sound notifications, many of these demands were rooted in a need to streamline and safeguard the job, creating a more stable and efficient means of work.

A physical demonstration occurred on November 13th as roughly fifty workers, predominantly male and South Asian, kicked off the strike to gather outside a storefront location for Foodpanda's pandamart in Kowloon Bay. As other delivery workers pledged to refuse orders over the weekend, calls from supporters to agitate Foodpanda management and its parent company circulated online. Demonstrators held up signs with slogans calling out unjust pay cuts and working conditions, saying "Foodpanda treats us like slaves!" and "We are humans, not dogs." (Lausan Collective, 2021) According to strikers' estimates, almost several thousand workers took part in this strike, while hundreds continued to show up to demonstrations in the following days. The 2021 strike was the third and most successful of previous strikes by Foodpanda delivery workers. When workers had previously demonstrated in July of the same year, four-hour negotiations with management seemed to yield little to any result, as well as tangible solutions on paper. This time around, representatives of the drivers were able to meet with management on November 16th, with a list of 15 demands that included long-standing grievances from said previous strike.

Waqas Fida, a Pakistani migrant worker, was a key figure according to several interviews that featured his role in organizing the strike. He had been suspended just a week before the strike took place, and coordinated the creation of a group chat of predominantly South Asian workers to first vent his frustrations, quickly growing to nearly 1500 members in size. Although the delivery workers theoretically do not share a physical space in the sense of one workplace, strikers mobilized through informal in-person networks, often while waiting to take orders from restaurants and other meeting points. A worker shared, "we all know each other in this area." Riders who familiarised themselves with one another therefore joined location-specific WhatsApp group chats and Telegram groups, eventually escalating towards scheduling a demonstration. Notably, none of the organizers had organized strikes in the past. (Chan, 2025)

A multitude of recent literature highlights the significant public media attention received by the strikers. Of particular interest is how this contributed to the process of 'visibilization' for specifically the South Asian workers. During the strike, workers

shared the idea of organizing a press conference in the Telegram group chat, leading to the Rider's Concern Group contacting the media. These workers therefore had the opportunity to publicise their grievances, and arguably benefitted from the particular attention to the strike due to their ethnic identity. Of the participants of the strike who were interviewed, all workers regardless of race also regarded that the South Asian workers exhibited stronger unity in organizing. Recent studies of the strike further underscore that South Asian riders arguably played a more important role in mobilizing their fellow riders, where South Asian interviewees identified more propensity to strike than their Chinese counterparts (C.P. Chan & Ho, 2021).

South Asian-Chinese worker solidarity

A sense of cross racial solidarity between South Asian and Chinese workers also emerged during this time. The Concern Group had first facilitated bonds across linguistic barriers between Chinese and English information shared in the Telegram group in 2021. One of the Han Chinese local couriers involved in the strike explained to Stand News that she was prompted by the organizing efforts from her "South Asian older brothers" to forward the call-to-action to other Han Chinese locals. As couriers often solely work in specific districts in Hong Kong, this kind of cross-coordination between regions was crucial for mobilization, as there was an urgent need to disseminate information between different language-speaking communities of workers. At the action, Ga Wing noted that the South Asian community had amassed in impressive numbers on the day of the demonstration. She further cited her anger at the racism her fellow South Asian workers suffered by disgruntled customers. Many of these incidents she had witnessed or heard informally, such as customers explicitly requesting non-South Asian couriers, or assumptions made about the legal status, and therefore rights deserved by migrant workers as opposed to the Chinese majority. An organizer of the 2022 strike cited that he was "inspired by the solidarity of South Asian riders who mobilized the strike," contributing to the theory of perceived strike success contributing to the sustained formation of worker solidarity. (Chan, 2025)

It should be said that this solidarity was not particularly straightforward, however, especially over time. Many South Asian riders also claimed that only a few Chinese workers were present at the demonstration, leading some to believe that Chinese workers did not entirely support the strike. The 2021 strike ended after Fida publicly called off the strike, despite workers collectively voting through the Telegram polling feature to continue striking. In its aftermath, the 2022 strike involved different participants who had grievances about the perceived success of the previous strike. Many participants also called into question the legitimacy of the Rider's Concern Group, as the labor rights group themselves were not composed of riders, but were a third-party actor.

Political futures of platform worker strikes

The Foodpanda strike was framed in an overwhelmingly industrial manner, as opposed to the politicized era of general strikes in the 2019 anti-ELAB movement. One of the participants from the strike, Boxson, a YouTuber and motorcycle courier who spoke during the action, believed that the strike "was not politically motivated." Yet, the depoliticised nature of this action in its public setting should not be so easily mistaken as a departure from the social movement unionism inherent in 2019. Boxson clarified that the anti-ELAB protests were an "important turning point" for him politically, and that he learned about a new way to "resist injustice" by going on strike. Here, the connection is made for Boxson between his participation first in the anti-ELAB movement and therefore his role as a worker.

The implementation of the NSL 11 months prior to the 2021 Foodpanda strikes also contributed to the relatively new chilling political environment Hong Kong finds itself in now, in that all protests and demonstrations were effectively made illegal. Even small gatherings have warranted being on the radar.

Predictably, demonstrators during the Foodpanda strike action on November 16th had their identity card numbers recorded and were told to disperse by police for "participating in illegal assembly." As a food delivery worker-organizer explained in the aftermath of the 2021 strikes when describing the contemporary struggle of independent union organisation, "There are no collective bargaining rights in Hong Kong, so the power of trade unions is limited nowadays, especially for independent unions. If delivery workers organise strikes themselves, they can't achieve much either. We have very little bargaining power." (Chan, 2025)

We know that the heightening contradictions of platform capitalism within Hong Kong's gig economy will only continue to increase. While the British company Deliveroo abruptly exited Hong Kong in early April, Chinese company Keeta and British Foodpanda have since remained the city's largest food delivery platforms. Keeta, owned by China's own leading food delivery platform, Meituan, has also seen couriers go on strike in 2023 and 2024, despite limitations on strike action in the Mainland. (Feng, 2023) Since then, several strikes as recent as May 22nd, 2025 were undertaken by Keeta workers in Hong Kong, the large majority of them also being South Asians. The spontaneous workers' struggles of South Asian platform workers in Hong Kong during this context is therefore notable in that while political unionism has altogether been largely quelled, moments of resistance among South Asian food delivery workers are becoming more frequent, notable, and thus deserve more strategic research.

Towards a platform worker's inquiry in Hong Kong

What is a workers' inquiry?

First popularised by Marx (1880), the workers' inquiry was devised first with the desire of externalising labor's grievances to develop an "exact and positive knowledge" of the conditions of the working class. At its inception, it manifested as a lengthy survey with one hundred questions, one that failed to draw any attention at the time. The development of Italian Marxism throughout the 20th century built and readapted much of this initial thought. Some criticism emerging out of workerism regards Marx's initial approach as top-down and argues in favor of a more dialogical, organizational, and tactical approach to the original question of gaining understanding of class composition. Thus, the worker's "self-inquiry" would insert the researcher within the working context, alongside other workers as a part of the struggle themselves.

The exact interpretations of the project of this method and its content have since been debated over time. I refer to Notes From Below to define two particular strands of workers' inquiries begin to emerge over its histories. (2018) First is the inquiry 'from above,' likened to Marx's original method of using traditional research to gain access to the knowledge about the workplace. Second is the inquiry 'from below,' a method involving "co-research," with emphasis on the workers themselves leading the production of knowledge. This co-research variant of the worker's inquiry therefore fundamentally seeks to understand the "class composition" of the workers, defined here by Notes from Below as three categories of class analysis: technical, social, and political. Technical composition is therefore defined as the knowledge of the organisation of work and workers, which is informed by the social composition, the knowledge of how workers are composed in society and their living. Political composition is defined as the knowledge of how workers are organised politically.

The workers' inquiry is hereby defined as an active, interventionist mode of research into labour processes and emergent political struggles. This method is vital in that it centers the collective perspective of the working class and reframes the experience of capitalist exploitation as an active process that we must fight against in the research method. Workers' inquiries are also action, and they aim to generate militant practices from an active point of view in workers' struggles. As Gigi Roggero aptly argues, "we need to study in order to act, we need to act in order to study. And to do the two things

together. Now more than ever, this is our political task." (2020)

Why a workers' inquiry for migrant platform workers?

I argue that the workers' inquiry is a radical research method fundamentally missing in current literature on migrant identity and platform workers in Hong Kong. There is a lot that the field can aim to gain as it relates to "digital workerism." I refer here to digital workerism as a method of analysis through utilizing class composition that centers how and why workers' struggle matters in the face of labor being more organised by digital technology. (Woodcock, 2021)

Firstly, a practice of digital workerism serves as a foil to other forms of research that have been conducted so far on the platform economy so far in Hong Kong. While policy recommendations, data collection, and ethnographic fieldwork have formed the basis of most content in this paper, it is clear that different blind spots methods are needed in order to truly understand the growing relationship between ethnic identity and platform work. Statistics that we have investigated so far in this paper like unionisation efforts and quantitative data collection can be limited in their scope, even though they are often regarded as institutional markers. The realities of organizing on the ground, much less for South Asian workers, are simply less known in Hong Kong, especially in its current political context.

In conducting a literature overview of how workers' inquiries have been utilised in platform economy research, research has ranged from more orthodox methods of ethnographic accounts in worker self-organization, to collective knowledge production and data-mapping among researcher-activists and fellow workers in conducting 'worker data science' (Gallagher, et al., 2023). Because of these interventionist methods, platform work researchers have been able to focus on generating strategy in the development of worker power in the present day context under platform capitalism.

While platform capitalism is often framed as a positive innovation in capitalist society, Marx denotes that the introduction of new technology also appears as a response on behalf of capital to the working-class struggle. (Woodcock, 2021) The capitalist class therefore harnesses and develops this digital technology to produce more capital, seen in how the architecture of platforms like Foodpanda and Deliveroo are designed to maximise profits for the platforms and deliberately mystify its labor processes, between the payment algorithms and the collection of data of workers.

These researchers have identified various factors in shifting dynamics of solidarity between workers and the public. For one, the technical and social composition of platform work generally reveals that striking platform workers engage in spontaneous and reactive wildcat strike action, with little base-building or infrastructure for long-term goals. While union organisation has sprouted globally among platform workers, many platforms still refuse to enter official negotiation with their workers in fear of indicating a relationship of employment with them. At the same time, there has been some movement made in Hong Kong, although its long-lasting effects remain unclear- where small concessions were made with bargaining committee members during the 2021-22 Foodpanda strike, certain negotiations that were once agreed upon were altogether reversed.

Conclusion

The struggles of South Asian platform workers in Hong Kong must be understood as part of a longer lineage of migrant labor struggles in the city: stretching from anti-colonial strikes of Chinese seafarers to the mass organizing of Filipino domestic workers, and into the contemporary moment of platform capitalism. While the racialization of South Asian workers continues to reproduce marginalisation, it has also shaped distinctive forms of solidarity, visibility, and collective action, as the Foodpanda strikes of 2021–22 demonstrated. These moments of resistance complicate assumptions of migrant passivity and highlight the ways ethnicity, class, and precarious labor intersect under Hong Kong's current political climate.

At the same time, the city's post-union landscape and the suppressive weight of the National Security Law limit the prospects for formalized labor organization. Against this backdrop, spontaneous and often short-lived strikes reveal both the potential and the fragility of collective action. What is needed, then, is a deeper inquiry into the technical, social, and political composition of these workers: a militant research practice that not only documents conditions but contributes to the making of worker power.

A workers' inquiry into South Asian platform labor would help fill the critical gap in knowledge left by conventional research, while also acting as a tool for political strategy. Such an approach insists that migrant workers are not only the subjects of academic study but also active agents in shaping the future of labor struggle in Hong Kong. In centering their voices, practices, and solidarities, we may better understand not just how platform work operates as a site of exploitation, but how it also contains the seeds of new collective possibilities in the city's fractured labor movement.

Works cited

Au-Yeung, Tat Chor, Chris King-Chi Chan, Cham Kit Ming, and Wing Yin Tsui. "The Gig Economy, Platform Work, and Social Policy: Food Delivery Workers' Occupational Welfare Dilemma in Hong Kong." *Journal of Social Policy* 54, no. 2 (January 4, 2024): 673–91. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047279423000673.

Bhowmik, Miron Kumar, Kerry J. Kennedy, Jan Christian Gube, and Joan Sau Chung. "Minoritised Communities and Hong Kong's 'Summer of Uprising': Attitudes and Engagement without Citizenship." *Asian Ethnicity* 24, no. 2 (September 5, 2022): 199–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2022.2120455.

Bonhomme, Macarena, and James Muldoon. "Racism and Food Delivery Platforms: Shaping Migrants' Work Experiences and Future Expectations in the United Kingdom and Chile." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 48, no. 10 (May 20, 2024): 1897–1920. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2024.2349268.

Chan, Andy W., Wilson W. S. Chow, Patricia Fosh, Ed Snape, and Robert Westwood. *Hong Kong Management and labour change and continuity*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012.

Chan, Anita, and Sallie Lau. "The Tidal Wave of New Unions during the Hong Kong Resistance Movement of 2019–20: Toward Social Movement Trade Unionism." *The China Journal* 90 (July 1, 2023): 106–28. https://doi.org/10.1086/725757.

Chan, Irene. "Around 270 Keeta Delivery Riders Strike to Protest 'unfair' System." Hong Kong Free Press HKFP, May 23, 2025. https://hongkongfp.com/2025/05/22/around-270-keeta-delivery-riders-strike-to-protest-unfair-system-reduced-pay/.

Chan, Ngai Keung. "Dynamics of Platform Architecture and Labor Unrest: Mobilizing and Contesting Solidarity in the 2021–2022 Foodpanda Delivery Rider Strikes in Hong Kong." *Social Media + Society* 11, no. 1 (January 2025). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051251319578.

Choudry, Aziz, and Mondli Hlatshwayo. "Migrant Unionism in Hong Kong:" *Just Work?*, Wildcat, 2016, 151–69. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt194xgtm.12.

Collective, Lausan. "What to Know about the Foodpanda Delivery Rider Strike." Lausan, November 18, 2021. https://lausancollective.com/2021/what-to-know-foodpanda-delivery-rider-strike/.

Constable, Nicole. "7. Resistance and Protest." *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, December 31, 2017, 151–80. https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801460463-010.

Constable, Nicole. "Migrant Workers and the Many States of Protest in Hong Kong." *Critical Asian Studies* 41, no. 1 (March 2009): 143–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/14672710802631202.

The Editorial collective of Notes from Below. "The Workers' Inquiry and Social Composition." Notes From Below, January 29, 2018. https://notesfrombelow.org/article/workers-inquiry-and-social-composition.

England, Joe. *Industrial Relations and law in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Feng, Jenny. “Meituan Couriers Go on Strike in Shanwei.” Web log. *The China Project* (blog), April 27, 2023. https://thechinaproject.com/2023/04/27/meituan-couriers-go-on-strike-in-shanwei/.

Gallagher, Cailean, Karen Gregory, and Boyan Karabaliev. “Digital Worker Inquiry and the Critical Potential of Participatory Worker Data Science for On-demand Platform Workers.” *New Technology, Work and Employment* 40, no. 1 (December 19, 2023): 20–40. https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12286.

Gebrial, Dalia. “Racial Platform Capitalism: Empire, Migration and the Making of Uber in London.” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 56, no. 4 (August 1, 2022): 1170–94. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518x221115439.

Iyengar, Rishi. “The Hong Kong Protests Are Creating a More Ethnically Unified City.” *Time Magazine*. October 21, 2014. https://time.com/3515664/the-hong-kong-protests-are-creating-a-more-ethnically-unified-city/.

Keith Ming, Cham Kit, Tat Chor Au-Yeung, and Gizem Arat. “Social Risks, Platform Economy, and Welfare Regime: Evidence from Platform Workers’ Views in Hong Kong.” *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development*, April 10, 2025, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/29949769.2025.2490040.

Kennedy, Kerry J., Jan Christian Gube, and Miron Kumar Bhowmik. “Identities in Troubled Times: Minoritized Youth in Hong Kong’s ‘Summer of Protest.’” *Societies* 13, no. 10 (October 2, 2023): 217. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc13100217.

Kuah-Pearce, Khun Eng, and Gilles Guiheux. *Social Movements in China and Hong Kong: The expansion of Protest Space*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011.

Lau, Shirley. “‘It’s an Uphill Struggle to Run a Trade Union in Hong Kong’ – but Still, They Organise.” Web log. *Equal Times* (blog), June 25, 2025. https://www.equaltimes.org/it-s-an-uphill-struggle-to-run-a#:~:text=Since%20HKCTU’s%20fall%2C%20the%20small,one%20to%20two%20more%20years.

Lee, James. “Hong Kong Delivery Workers’ Rights Group Ceases Operations.” *Hong Kong Free Press*, July 1, 2025. https://hongkongfp.com/2025/07/01/hong-kong-delivery-workers-rights-group-ceases-operations/.

Leung, Kai-ping Benjamin, and Wing-kai Chiu Stephen. *A social history of industrial strikes and the labour movement in Hong Kong, 1946-1989*. Hong Kong: Social Sciences Research Centre, University of Hong Kong, 1991.

Leung, Lisa Y.M. “‘No South Asian Riders, Please’: The Politics of Visibilisation in Platformed Food Delivery Work during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Hong Kong.” *Critical Sociology* 48, no. 7–8 (May 2, 2022): 1189–1203. https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205221091449.

Leutner, Mechthild, Roland Felber, M. L. Titarenko, and A. M. Grigoriev. *The Chinese revolution in the 1920s: Between Triumph and disaster*. London: Routledge, 2015.

Li, Promise, and Eni Lestari. “Fighting for Migrant Workers in Hong Kong.” Monthly Review, September 8, 2025. https://monthlyreview.org/articles/fighting-for-migrant-workers-in-hong-kong/.

Manning, Chris. “Structural Change, Economic Crisis and International Labour Migration in East Asia.” *The World Economy* 25, no. 3 (March 2002): 359–85. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9701.00437.

Mung, Christopher Siu-tat. “History Will Remember HKCTU’s Legacy .” Web log. *Hong Kong Labour Rights Monitor* (blog), October 3, 2022. https://hklabourrights.org/news/history-will-remember-hkctus-legacy/.

Mung, Christopher Siu-tat. “Independent Trade Unions’ Diminished Voice Threatens Labor Rights in Hong Kong.” *The Diplomat*. May 14, 2024. https://thediplomat.com/2024/05/independent-trade-unions-diminished-voice-threatens-labor-rights-in-hong-kong/#:~:text=Faced%20with%20a%20deteriorating%20political,lacked%20power%20within%20labor%20relations.

Ng, Sek Hong, and Olivia Ip. “Hong Kong Working Class and Union Organization: A Historical Glimpse.” *China Perspectives* 2007, no. 2 (April 15, 2007). https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.1733.

Po-lung, Leung. “Hong Kong Political Strikes: A Brief History.” Lausan, September 19, 2020. https://lausancollective.com/2019/hong-kong-political-strikes-brief-history/.

Roggero, Gigi, and Clara Pope. *Italian operaismo: Genealogy, history, method*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2023.

Rother, Stefan, and Jürgen Rüland. “Diffusion in Transnational Political Spaces: Political Activism of Philippine Labor Migrants in Hong Kong.” *Diffusion in Transnational Political Spaces: Political Activism of Philippine Labor Migrants in Hong Kong*. Thesis, Universität, 2012.

Sim, Amy. “Organising Discontent: Ngos for Southeast Asian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong.” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 31, no. 3 (2003): 478–510. https://doi.org/10.1163/156853103322895351.

Skeldon, Ronald. “Labour Migration to Hong Kong.” *Asean Economic Bulletin* 12, no. 2 (November 1995): 201–18. https://doi.org/10.1355/ae12-2g.

Tassinari, Arianna, and Vincenzo Maccarrone. “Riders on the Storm: Workplace Solidarity among Gig Economy Couriers in Italy and the UK.” *Work, Employment and Society* 34, no. 1 (July 26, 2019): 35–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017019862954.

Wilbur, C. Martin. “China, Britain, and Hong Kong, 1895–1945. by Chan Lau Kit-Ching. Shatin, N. T., Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1990. 479 Pp.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 51, no. 3 (August 1992): 636–37. https://doi.org/10.2307/2057964.

Woodcock, Jamie. *The fight against Platform Capitalism: An Inquiry into the global struggles of the Gig Economy*. London: University of Westminster Press, 2021.

Woodcock, Jamie. “Workers Inquiry and the Experience of Work.” *Experiencing the New World of Work*, January 31, 2021, 136–56. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108865814.010.