

The Book of Esther and Ten Years' "Local Egg" A Comparative Reading on Power and Empire

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Abstract

This paper offers a decolonial reading of Esther through the lens of the short "Local Egg" from the anthology film *Ten Years*. The film, composed of five shorts, depicts a dystopian Hong Kong set in 2025. "Local Egg" is the last short. This short portrays the story of a father and his son who are both navigating the dynamics of living under an oppressive regime as ordinary citizens. Adopting Edward Said's definition of imperialism, the two texts—the book of Esther and "Local Egg"—will be evaluated on their own terms, followed by a discussion on decolonial themes. Finally, we will conclude with a brief discussion regarding decolonisation arising from these two texts.

Introduction

The book of Esther invites its readers to consider life in the Jewish Diaspora, where, as a settled people in a land and empire not their own, they lived tangibly under the direct threat of elimination. From the start, questions of power and powerlessness are raised, yet the book does not yield easy conclusions as to its purpose. Is it a comedy, or does it present some sort of theology of leadership? Or perhaps, does it take wisdom literature and detail a story wherein wisdom is appropriated? Like the rest of the Hebrew Bible, the richness of the text provides an opportunity for a "poly-commentary, multi-voiced, indeterminate, divergent, suggestive, and limitless."¹ This paper seeks to add to that poly-commentary by reading Esther comparatively with the short "Local Egg" (本地蛋), directed by Ng Ka-Leung (吳家良), in the film *Ten Years* (十年) (2015), drawing out key post-colonial² themes via postcolonial scholar Edward Said's definition of imperialism.

1 David J.A. Clines, "Esther and the Future of the Commentary," in *The Book of Esther in Modern Research*, ed. Leonard J. Greenspoon and Sidnie White Crawford (London: T&T Clark International, 2003), 21.

2 The terms postcolonial and post-imperial will be used interchangeably.

The paper will begin with a brief introduction of the two texts, which will then be followed by a discussion of the postcolonial themes. They are as follows: first, the totalising force of imperialism and second, methods of non-resistance and resistance. Finally, the paper will conclude with a discussion of what decolonisation might look like from these two texts.

The Two Texts

Certainly, there are differences between the texts: language, culture, and place in time being the most obvious ones. For the purposes of this paper, there are two key differences: first, Esther occurs in the very centre of imperial power, while Hong Kong, though still a major economic centre, is on the fringes of power, far from Beijing and from the West. Second, the book of Esther is a text with the diasporic community as protagonist, whereas *Ten Years*' protagonists remain in their own land. However, both texts have diasporic dimensions.³ Esther speaks to those dispersed, where *Ten Years* speaks to the imminent destruction of the homeland, both in the homeland and in the diaspora. But, whether in the diaspora or remaining in the homeland, the hegemonic imperial framework remains the same, though there are different nuances to the lived experience. This section will endeavour to set the two texts on their own terms before turning to an analysis of the book of Esther through "Local Egg."

The Book of Esther

The book of Esther is a complicated text. It is the story of a threatened minority people living in the heart of the Persian Empire who rose to power, came to be feared by other peoples of the Empire, and had one of their own prominent leaders rise to become the second-in-command of all the empire. It is also the retelling of a young woman who steps forward despite her powerlessness to intervene for her people's survival. It is the story of a people wrestling for identity and wondering how to remain the people of God with the threat of not only death but also assimilation hanging over them. At the same time, it is a comedy where buffoons get their comeuppance. This text is largely driven by narrative, with "less . . . quoted speech than most comparable biblical material."⁴ Per Jon Levenson's proposed structure, the text is understood as framed in a chiasmic structure that indicates a series of reversals, in ways that largely seem too improbable to be historically

3 Defining the diaspora: Following Kim Butler's summarization and characterization of diasporas: Dispersal to two or more locations; collective mythology of homeland; alienation from hostland; idealization of return to homeland; ongoing relationship with homeland; ethnonational consciousness; existence over at least two generations (Kim D. Butler, "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse," *Diaspora* 10 [2001]: 191–93).

4 Jon D. Levenson, *Esther: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 1.

factual.⁵ However, what is important for this paper is the way this text has been received and how it has impacted the community of faith. Thus, the final canonical form will be considered here: largely, the Hebrew text will be examined, with the English primary translation as the New Revised Standard Version.

Ten Years (十年)

When the film *Ten Years* (十年) was released in 2015, Hong Kong received it with great fanfare among those in the pro-democracy movement. The film is composed of five shorts, each envisioning potential horrors a decade in the future.⁶ Capturing the insecurity of living in the “One Country, Two Systems,” the film deftly illustrates the pro-democracy movement’s pre-National Security Law *zeitgeist* thirst for change. The fear elaborated is not simply oppression but assimilation and erasure such that the Hong Kong identity is no different than that of the mainland. As pointed out by scholar Justin K. H. Tse, the inscription of Amos 5:13b–14a⁷ at the end of the film—along with the statement “Already too late” fading out and replaced with “Not too late”—at the very least suggests there may be theological intention behind the film, though there is no other explicit mention of religion or of God. Moreover, as Tse deftly illustrates, the protest movement itself is deeply theological, and so to understand the film in that vein would not be a far stretch.⁸

“Local Egg” is the last short of the film. It opens with Sam, a small shop owner, receiving a call that the last chicken farm in Hong Kong—where he gets his supply of eggs—will be shut down shortly. Sam, deciding to visit one last time, is gazing over the farm when he encounters Cheung, the farm’s owner, who is on his way to bring the last batch of eggs to Sam. Cheung tells Sam that he is being forced to close the farm, despite his compliance with the government’s increasingly restrictive rules.

Returning to the store, Sam is visited by the Youth Guards—youngsters dressed in uniforms not unlike those of the Cultural Revolution’s Red Guards, and of which Sam’s son (Ming) is one. They tell him that they will be writing him up for using a censored word, “local,” in labelling his eggs. After several terse

5 Levenson, *Esther*, 9; however, it has been noted that this book has recorded features with significant detail and accuracy.

6 This is particularly resonant in the aftermath of the implementation of the National Security Law, with Hong Kong coming to terms with its merging back into China proper.

7 The inscription reads: 「時勢真惡。」—預言者阿摩司寫於公元前800年—「你們要求善，不要求惡，就必存活。」 (“It is an evil time.”—The prophet Amos wrote this in 800 BCE—“Seek good, and not evil, that you may live”) (*Ten Years*, directed by Ng Ka-leung, 2015 [Hong Kong: Ten Years Studio/Netflix, 2019], Netflix).

8 Justin K. H. Tse, “Introduction: The Umbrella Movement and Liberation Theology,” in *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement*, ed. Justin K. H. Tse and Jonathan Y. Tan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 37–44; many of the producers and directors of the film have connections to the Hong Kong Protestant movement, including executive producer Andrew Choi, who is Dr. Philemon Choi Yuen-wan (蔡元雲), a significant leader in the Hong Kong church.

conversations with Ming, Sam later encounters Ming with other Youth Guards, throwing eggs at a closed bookstore. Shortly, Sam finds out that Ming has been sneaking lists of censored items to the bookstore owner, Lam, to protect the bookstore and the books. Together, they walk to the apartment where all the censored books have been hidden, where Sam, reassured that he has not lost his son to the Youth Guards, exhorts Lam to never be accustomed to suppression. The film ends with Sam and Ming, mutually agreeing on the ridiculousness of government restrictions as Ming reads a banned manga—Doraemon.

Imperialism and Post-Imperialism

Since it has been established that both texts deal with the problem of empire, it is important that imperialism is identified: what it is and how it is enacted. Per scholar Edward Said, imperialism can be defined in the following ways. Imperialism is the “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory.”⁹ This is manifest in several ways. The first is through land acquisition and seeing the conquered peoples as “subject races,” “subordinate peoples,” or “inferior.”¹⁰ Second, imperial rule is marked by tension, inequality, and injustice, where the bounds are clearly set by the ruler to the ruled.¹¹ Third, the imperialists’ system creates a dependency on—and even veneration for—the imperialists by the conquered.¹² This dependency is created when the imperialists incentivise dependency by rewarding adherence to the imperial system.¹³ Lastly, the imperialists disregard the memory and history of the conquered, effectively gaslighting the conquered and re-creating them into the imperialists’ image.¹⁴ The following themes do not fit neatly into each of the descriptors of imperialism, though they certainly do overlap.

The Totalising Force of Imperialism

Though non-exhaustive, this section illustrates the immersion and totality of the imperial complex by examining instances of how violence legitimises the bounds of empire and self-identification.

Boundaries, Force, and Legitimacy

The empire asserts its authority via force, and its legitimacy is upheld in its *perception* of legitimacy or to the extent that the population within the state is willing

9 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 9.

10 Said, *Culture*, 9.

11 Said, *Culture*, 11.

12 Said, *Culture*, 20.

13 Said, *Culture*, 147.

14 Said, *Culture*, 105–109.

to recognise this legitimacy.¹⁵ The law creates the bounds of the state—what is acceptable and what is not—and protects the empire itself. In “Local Egg,” this relationship is illustrated in a few ways. First, Cheung, speaking to Sam, illustrates the way in which he has attempted to abide by the bounds of empire, to little avail:

CHEUNG: Sam, it’s not that I want to close the farm. . . . I’m being forced to. They’re saying that we’re using the farm against the government. . . . My father’s heart desire was simple. Local chicken for Hong Kong people to eat, so we can eat our own food. For years, they’ve been saying “build this,” “tear down that.” We’ve been messed around with for years . . . only to realise they were gradually killing us off.¹⁶

Cheung leaves for Taiwan but only because there is nothing left for him in Hong Kong. He leaves to keep some of his father’s desire alive though now planted in a different place; he has effectively been exiled.

The second illustration of this relationship is the presence of the Youth Guard, who hyper-examine every detail, looking for the slightest step out of line (which includes the necessity of hiding certain texts). This, coupled with the attack on the bookstore, serves to act as censorship: as George Orwell writes, “if liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.”¹⁷ Yet, Sam, Lam (the bookstore owner), and the people on the streets have accepted their legitimacy of force (or at least become resigned to it)—likely because these Youth Guards are their own children.¹⁸ On the Youth Guard’s banned list is the word “local,” and coupled with the closing of Cheung’s farm and the egging of Lam’s bookstore, it can be concluded that the HongKonger identity is no longer one that is acceptable to empire. Also significant is that in Chinese civil society, legality (法) is always the last resort—when legalistic measures are “employed by the state, it is not interpreted as the normal functioning of civil society, but as the workings of a paternalistic system of punishment.”¹⁹ Thus, the sense of wrongness

15 Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 34.

16 *Ten Years*.

17 George Orwell, “The Freedom of the Press,” *The Orwell Foundation*, accessed June 26, 2021, <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/the-freedom-of-the-press/>.

Also see Alex W. Palmer, “The Case of Hong Kong’s Missing Booksellers,” *New York Times*, April 3, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/03/magazine/the-case-of-hong-kongs-missing-booksellers.html>.

18 This motif recalls the 2012 protest against the proposed imposition of “moral and national education” in schools. Cf. Juliana Liu, “Hong Kong debates ‘national education’ classes,” *BBC News*, 1 September 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-19407425>.

19 Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 238.

is heightened and emphasises an authoritarian regime that cares very little for *its own norms* and only seeks to control.

Similarly, the Jewish Diaspora has quietly settled into life in the centre of imperial power (2:5–7) and has largely accepted the use of force of the empire as legitimate. This is evidenced in the following ways. When Esther is taken, Mordecai makes no effort to stop her from being taken or perhaps feels that he cannot, likely because of the felt futility of such an action (2:8). Ancient historian Herodotus recounts Xerxes's famous cruelty in the story of Pythias of Lydian, whose five sons were conscripted for the Persian Wars. Pythias, wanting an heir to care for him in his old age, asks that his eldest be released from the army. Xerxes, outraged at Pythias's presumption that Xerxes's campaign might not be successful, removes the eldest son from the ranks and splits him in two, and then marches his army between the two sections of the corpse left on the side of the road.²⁰

At his place in the gate, Mordecai foils the assassination of the king (2:19–23), actively supporting the structures of the empire. And Esther, in her plea for her people, emphasises that she would not have spoken out if the decree had only issued the enslavement of her people and not the elimination of them (7:3–4). Accepting slavery as conventional,²¹ this situates her and her people's predicament in transactional terms, adhering to the imperial (objective) gaze of the conquered as subject who exist to prop up the empire. With regards to the rule of law, a member of one oppressed group petitions for the full elimination of another oppressed people group; the impression is given that this system fully relies on violence to enforce its boundaries and that its security is found in how oppressed peoples police themselves.

Conforming to Colonial Systems

The protagonists in both texts personally conform to the colonial value systems and embed themselves within the imperial hierarchies. Ming is an obedient Youth Guard member. In Ming and Sam's second interaction, there is a sense of fear as Ming tells his father that the Youth Guard commander is no longer required to disclose to Youth Guard members' parents what the Youth Guard activities will be. This, coupled with Ming's reticence to talk to his father, builds tension, and Sam is visibly shaken as he attempts to talk some sense into his son. As for Esther, she ingratiates herself to the eunuchs and gains favour with all; moreover, she uses her charm to become queen (2:9). Mordecai is also part of the system, moving from

20 Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, vol. 3: *Books V–VII*, trans. A. D. Godley, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 7.38–39.

21 Marion A. Taylor, *Ruth, Esther: The Story of God Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 176.

the gate in the beginning of the narrative (2:19)—where he is both outsider and insider in the liminal space—and finally, into the inner court of the king (10:3).

Similarly, the antagonist in “Local Egg” is a local Hong Kong boy who has fully bought into the role of the Youth Guard, blindly obeying without thinking. In the book of Esther, the antagonist is pointedly *not* King Ahasuerus, but a man from another colonised nation, the Amalekites/Agagites: Haman.²² He is fully embedded in the system, and from his request to eliminate the Jews in chapter 3, it is likely that he is part of the mechanics of force. Simultaneously, that Haman the Agagite is seen as the threat, and not the Persians, speaks to the colonised mindset of the text. The great imperial dream, then, is not simply imposed from the outside, but also “cultivated in the local milieu . . . [is the] longing to become an . . . imperial subject.”²³

Clothing

Clothing plays a part in illuminating imperialism in these narratives. The first overt sense of imperialism’s encroachment in “Local Egg” is the Youth Guard’s uniforms. These uniforms are like the Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution.²⁴ Thus, the short deliberately echoes the horror of this memory of the worst of authoritarian rule, made even more horrible as they are worn by elementary-aged children. A more subtle nod to previous encounters with imperialism is Ming’s school uniform: a stereotypical British school uniform that was adopted in Hong Kong.

Similarly, upon winning favour, Esther is adorned in the harem. It might be assumed that all the women have been given similar treatment. But the repeated pronominal suffixes in Esth 2:9, along with the extra cosmetic treatments and food given to her (את־מְרוֹקִיָּה ואת־מְנוּתָה לַתֵּת לָהּ), set her apart as distinct and as receiving a possible edge to win the queenship.²⁵ Mordecai is later given the king’s finery, being recognised for his role in saving the king (ch. 6). This clothing change triggers the beginning of the reversal of fate, where Haman is foretold his doom and Mordecai and Haman are rewarded and punished within the same imperial grid that entraps them both. By the end of the book, Mordecai is clothed in royal robes and honour, seemingly having exchanged Jewish autonomy for imperial—normative—measures of success (6:11; 8:15; 10:2).

22 Cf. Discussion on the Amalekites/Agagites in Timothy K. Beal, *Esther*, BOS (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999), 44–46; Taylor, *Ruth, Esther*, 127; and especially for midrashic and aggadic discussion in Erica Brown, *Esther: Power, Fate and Fragility in Exile*, Kindle edition (New Milford: Maggid, 2020), §3.3.

23 Chen, *Asia as Method*, 171.

24 Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 602–609.

25 Frederic Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1996), 364.

Behavioural Cues

The behavioural cues in “Local Egg” indicate too how far imperial reach goes. In Sam’s conversation with Cheung, he reflects that compliance or non-compliance have the same net result: Cheung’s farm is still being shut down regardless. This reflection is done in quiet resignation, if in disbelief. Yet, despite Cheung’s invitation to join him in Taiwan, Sam is hesitant to leave—though the audience is not given a reason why. Second, the Youth Guard are seen as a normal part of daily life: Sam’s reaction to the Youth Guard is shock, not at their appearance, but that they are taking photos *again*.

Esther and Mordecai are portrayed with similar behavioural cues that indicate the imperial infiltration into their own lives. Levenson notes in Esth 2:5 that **אִישׁ יְהוּדִי** (“a Jew”) is a reference not to the Palestinian “Judean” community but to the Judean diaspora—those who have chosen not to return to the area around Jerusalem. And coupled with Esth 8:17, where Persians became Jews (the denominative verb **מְתִיחִים** [“to become a Jew”]), self-understanding has shifted such that identity is no longer tied to the land.²⁶ There is now a sense of openness as the Diaspora creatively engages with—but also to some degree adapts to—the bounds that the Persian Empire has set.

That whole descriptor of Mordecai (2:5–6) is intriguing: though he bears a non-Hebrew name and is a citizen of Susa, “his patronym is three generations long. . . . He is a Jew and a Benjaminite, identifiers that are tribal, cultural and political. . . . He is in a sense introduced as a multihyphenated character, a ‘Benjaminite-Judean/Jewish-Persian.’”²⁷ Pertinent to the conversation too is that the Judean/Jewish identity may be an ethnic identity “that is constructed from the outside, by other nations, who lumped all those tribal differences into one group identity—namely, those exiled from Judea.”²⁸ Though the tribal identity remains (highlighting the particular), multi-hyphenation betrays an identity textured by his social location as a subject in the empire. Further, this identity is distinct from those who have returned to the land, though related—Esther and Mordecai have remained in the Diaspora, though the option to return has been opened.

Moreover, Mordecai warns Esther not to disclose her ethnic identity, and while Esther has a Jewish name (Hadassah), she goes by her Persian name, allowing her to “pass as a citizen of the empire.”²⁹ Moreover, it was likely that she did not—or could not, given that she is the object of the verbs (2:7–9)—abide by the norms of

26 Jon D. Levenson, “Scroll of Esther in Ecumenical Perspective,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 13 (1976): 450.

27 Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, “Diasporic Reading of a Diasporic Text: Identity Politics and Race Relations and the Book of Esther,” in *Interpreting Beyond Borders*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 169.

28 Beal, *Esther*, 27–28.

29 Brown, *Esther*, §2.2.3.

her people. With regards to sexuality, there is little doubt she would have had sexual intercourse with the king. There is sensuality infused in the text: the motif of “giving the cosmetics” occurs three times (2:3, 9, 12), the oils and perfumes meant to make the women more attractive, the explicit naming of the king taking pleasure from each of the women (2:14), and the threefold repetition of women going *into* the king (2:13–14). Scholars also identify Esther’s name with Ishtar, “the principal goddess of the ancient Near East . . . associated primarily with love, eroticism, and sexual power. In this light, Esther’s name may be interpreted with a connotation of goddess-like sexual power.”³⁰ Moreover, at the banquet thrown in her honour, she would have been unable to abide by Jewish dietary laws, lest she give away her Jewish identity (2:18).³¹

Death

Finally, the overlaying sense of death is present in both texts. In “Local Egg,” the lists the Youth Guards carry around banning certain items as well as the closing of Cheung’s farm create the sense that Hong Kong’s identity is being erased. Moreover, the word “local” is seen as seditious, which gives a sense that the particular is no longer welcome. Only the hegemonic remains. Further, the plot of “Local Egg” is driven by Sam and Ming’s relationship, and Sam’s worry is palpable as he considers losing his son to the imperial system. Finally, the nod to the Cultural Revolution via the Youth Guards reminds the viewer of the worst of the imperial regime and the consequences of standing up to empire.

Similarly, Esther is known by her Persian name, and her eager rush to give clothes to Mordecai may indicate that she is “no longer sensitive to the Jewish language of ritual and loss. She now sp[eaks] the Persian king’s language of rules and royalty.”³² Might it be possible that Mordecai thinks he is losing his ward to the false identity he told her to adopt? While the threat of death for the Jews in Esther 3 is a visible threat with physical dimensions, the threat of erasure for HongKongers in the short is primarily metaphysical and psychological (with an indirect threat of the physical). In both cases, the weight of the empire is behind this threat of death.

Significantly, it has been noted that God and land are not mentioned in this text, and given that God and land are central to the identity of the Jewish people, the question of God without land is a significant question—especially for the Diaspora.³³ Scholars like Levenson have surmised that this is simply the expansion of the exodus motif, though nuanced differently than in other post-exilic literature

30 Beal, *Esther*, 28.

31 Carey A. Moore, *Esther: A New Translation with Introduction and Notes*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 22.

32 Brown, *Esther*, §4.3.2.

33 Cf. Levenson, “Scroll of Esther,” 445–46.

(particularly Second Isaiah).³⁴ Still, there is a sense of danger, loss, bewilderment, and uncertainty as the people of God begin to chart their way anew—all this amidst figuring out how to survive in the face of a hegemonic entity that threatens to swallow them whole.³⁵ But perhaps this section might be better articulated in this way: will Sam lose his son? Will they lose sense of who they are as Hong-Kongers? Will Esther remember who she is? Who are the Jews in a land not their own? Where is God in this story, especially outside of the promised land? Will God let his people die?

Resistance or Compliance?

Imperialism creates conditions where a parasitic relationship forms between the conquered and the imperialists, and adherence to the imperial system is rewarded with privilege within the system—though this comes at a cost to their fellow conquered peoples. Yet, compliance is not the only response, nor is there a single way to resist. In this section, we will explore the different types of compliance, as well as the different shades of resistance exemplified in this text.

Types of Compliance

There are different types of compliance, stressing here that though the totalising force of imperialism might compel one to comply, compliance is not merely an automatic response. The response has some agency in deciding to side with the powers that be. The first is full compliance, where members of the oppressed people groups fully buy into the imperial system in return for privilege. In the case of the leader of the Youth Guard, he speaks Cantonese, not Mandarin, which means he is a local boy. His tone is supercilious—if even rude in speaking to an elder (Sam). Further, the confidence with which he issues commands with the whistle hanging around his neck indicates familiarity and comfort in his role. Moreover, when Sam questions the logic of the command issued to the Youth Guard leader and asks the boy to think for himself, the young Youth Guard is unwavering in his dogmatic obedience: “I don’t know. Anyway, I’m going to record anything against the rules.”³⁶ This dogmatism likely has lent to his current position as the leader of his Youth Guard posse.

Likewise, Haman the Agagite has climbed to the very top of the imperial structure, with others bowing down and doing obeisance to him (3:1). There is no real justification for his promotion, nor is there a specific title given for his new position. Additionally, he approaches the king without requesting an audience, is immediately trusted with the king’s signet ring, and is told that he can “do with

34 Levenson, “Scroll of Esther,” 449.

35 Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, 314.

36 *Ten Years*.

them as it seems good to you” (3:11 NRSV). However, for all his prestige, power, and privilege, he remains *the Agagite*, not the Persian—he is still an outsider to the system for all that he has ingratiated himself to it.³⁷

Mordecai’s level of compliance might find an equivalence in the character of Sam. Like Sam, Mordecai makes the best living he can in Persia. Sam minds his own business—for the most part—tending to his little shop in the plaza but also desiring local products for his neighbours. He also keeps close tabs on his son, Ming, and frustratingly can get no details about the banned list. Correspondingly, Mordecai has largely kept his Jewish identity and has made no large effort to counter the empire—even actively assimilating by suggesting that Esther hide her identity and by saving the king (2:10, 19–23). He would walk around in front of the court of the harem every day to learn how Esther was and *what was being done to her*. Timothy Beal suggests this might indicate that his concern is not solely his ward’s welfare but also “his investment in her for his own self-interest . . . as Mordecai’s link with the central Persian politics.”³⁸

Ming, Sam’s son, is analogous to Esther. As a child, he is powerless; in the Youth Guard, he is not among its leadership. He goes along with his posse after school, inspecting alongside them; he also holds the carton of eggs as the rest of the Youth Guards throw the eggs at Lam’s bookstore. When his father chases the rest of the posse away, he says to his father: “I didn’t throw anything. I wasn’t allowed not to come. I didn’t know what I could do.”³⁹ Similarly, Esther is a pawn in the political game, and as a woman who is *acted upon*, she has had very little agency and power up until this point, beyond her charms. When confronted by Mordecai who asks her to intervene on behalf of the Jews, she responds that she cannot go to the king for fear of her own death (4:10–11). She does not directly say that she does not want to intervene but merely says that this plea from Mordecai is out of the realm of reasonable possibility for her. In both Ming’s and Esther’s cases, that which is reasonable seems to be staying in one’s own lane, though both indicate that there is willingness to act (and in both cases, they *do* act).

Finally, Sam articulates the catch-22 of compliance in response to Cheung’s comments on being forced to close down his farm: “Huh? No way. You and your father did whatever they asked. So, complying or not complying, you’re doomed either way.”⁴⁰ Similarly, the Jews seem to have adapted and conformed to life in

37 There is something to be said that the presence of Haman and his ensuing conflict with Mordecai (and secondarily Esther) emphasises the traditional enmity between the Israelites and the Amalekites.

38 Beal, *Esther*, 32.

39 *Ten Years*; The phrase is 「我唔知我可以點做」 which carries a semantic range of “I don’t know what I was supposed to do,” and “I didn’t know what I could do differently,” or “I didn’t know what else I could do,” as well as the above translation.

40 *Ten Years*.

Persia; significantly, “apart from fasting, no distinctively religious practices or concepts seem to be in the canonical version [of the book of Esther].”⁴¹ Yet, this conformity does not save them; the edict issued brings to the very fore the fragility of being subject in the hegemonic imperial grid (3:15–4:3). Vashti is another example of this; though she held the role of queen, her disobedience costs her the queenship, if not her life (1:16–22).

Various Shades of Resistance

The various shades of resistance are harder to identify, if only because resisting external forces is insufficient, given the reach and creeping in of imperialism to every facet of the subjects’ lives. The different types of resistance that will be discussed are the confrontations, the egg motif, humour, the use of space, and the role of memory and story in resistance.

Confrontation: loud, direct gestures. In “Local Egg,” there are two significant paralleling scenes that illustrate confrontation, both involving the main protagonist, Sam. In the first scene, Sam confronts the Youth Guard leader who has come by his shop to inspect it. At the end of the scene, Sam says to the Youth Guard, “If you don’t know, you should use your brain to think it through. Don’t just do exactly as you’re told.”⁴² Similarly, in the second scene, Sam confronts his son, who he feels has been keeping secrets from him:

SAM: Ming, you’ve been eating eggs from Cheung-Gor’s farm ever since you were little. I don’t care what others say, or what that banned list says. There is nothing wrong with eating or selling his eggs. The ones who are in the wrong are those who accuse others for no reason. Do you understand?

MING: Yes.

SAM: Look at me for a minute. No matter what, don’t just follow others blindly. Think before you act. (Pause). OK?⁴³

In a high-context culture, this direct confrontation is jarring and conveys Sam’s frustration and sense of trying to change things however he can. While Sam’s first confrontation likely changes nothing, the Youth Guard leader is given an opportunity to reconsider his position: that of a child soldier who answers to an invisible system that has no investment in him beyond his utilitarian value.⁴⁴ Yet, his second

41 Moore, *Esther*, xxxi–xxxii.

42 *Ten Years*.

43 *Ten Years*.

44 There is something to be said about this as an interaction where an elder is within his right to address a junior, but the rude response emphasises the wrongness of the interaction, and the unflinching matter-of-fact tone suggests that Sam is out of line in questioning this young Youth Guard (and thereby the system).

confrontation—no less jarring—is one based in trust and relationship, and his words do make an impact on his son, who later refuses to actively participate in the eggging of Lam’s bookstore.

Likewise, the character of Vashti has been lauded for her direct confrontation of her husband and her refusal to cede to his tyranny.⁴⁵ Her refusal illuminates the king’s excesses as well as his own impotence—his utter reliance on his advisors and his inability to manage his own household.

Mordecai also resists visibly three times. The first is his refusal to bow to Haman: he suggests to the king’s servants that he cannot bow to Haman because he “is a Jew” (3:5). Yet, there is nothing external to support this, given that Jews did obeisance to kings and other superiors (1 Sam 24:8; Gen 23:7, etc.).⁴⁶ Regardless, this is both very odd and very visible, given that he told his ward to hide her own identity. His tearing of his clothes and adopting the mourning ritual at the king’s gate are also very much visible and disruptive. But unlike his first action that brings doom for his people, this second action of tearing his garments communicates to Esther that “something had been irreparably ripped. . . . The tear is a primal gesture, connecting Mordecai to his grief, to his niece, to his people beside him, and to those long before him who also tore into garments to capture the pain that transcended words.”⁴⁷ The second action as a public gesture is for his ward Esther, to compel her to act on behalf of her people, but also for the world, that the “powerless must grieve, and then the powerless must fight.”⁴⁸ The third occurs in chapter 5, where Mordecai “neither rose nor trembled before [Haman]” (5:9). These two last gestures recall Mordecai and Esther to their roots and disrupt the hegemonic frame by their refusal to submit to this royal edict lying down, even to the oppressor’s very face.

The egg motif. Vashti might serve as a warning of how an individual’s effort has no effect on the hegemonic imperial frame. Yet, for all the seeming futility of small persons, the egg motif in “Local Egg” “pays homage to [novelist] Haruki Murakami’s manifesto about the egg that breaks against the high wall—a metaphor for the individual’s clash with the system.”⁴⁹ Specifically, Murakami writes,

45 Cf. Mmapula Diana Kebaneilwe, “The Vashti Paradigm: Resistance as a Strategy for Combating HIV,” *The Ecumenical Review* 63 (2011): 378–83; Madipoane Masenya, “‘Limping, Yet Made to Climb a Mountain!’ Re-Reading the Vashti Character in the HIV and AIDS South African Context,” in *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 534–47.

46 Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, 379. The LXX, however, does suggest that he refused to bow down because Haman was not God (LXX addition C 13:12–14).

47 Brown, *Esther*, §4.1.2. Note that Esth 2:7 indicates that Esther is Mordecai’s uncle’s daughter.

48 Brown, *Esther*, §4.1.2.

49 Maggie Lee, “Film Review: ‘Ten Years,’” *Variety*, April 19, 2016, <https://variety.com/2016/film/reviews/ten-years-film-review-1201748166/>.

Between a high solid wall and an egg that breaks against it, I will stand on the side of egg. Yes, no matter how right the wall may be and how wrong the egg, I will stand with the egg. Someone else will have to decide what is right and what is wrong; perhaps time or history will decide. . . . What is the meaning of this metaphor? In some cases, it is all too simple and clear. Bombers and tanks and rockets and white phosphorus shells are that high, solid wall. The eggs are unarmed civilians who are crushed and burned and shot by them. . . . This is not all, though. . . . Each of us, is more or less, an egg. . . . And each of us . . . is confronting a high, solid wall . . . The System. The System is supposed to protect us, but sometimes it takes a life on its own, and then it begins to kill us and cause us to kill others—coldly, efficiently, systematically.⁵⁰

Every little bit counts. Even if there is only one egg, that wall is left with egg on its face. For both Ming and Esther, their small status is what makes them improbable hero(ine)s, and their actions—Ming, slipping the banned list to Lam, and Esther, walking into the king’s court—both have the direst of consequences. Both step bravely forward, though not in the most conventional of ways. Ming sneaks, while Esther steps into her husband’s court, armed only with her charm and wit. Yet, Ming’s actions enable Lam and his patrons to squirrel away books in a secret apartment, a place where HongKongers can remain free. Esther, “only” a woman, is able to manipulate her husband into sympathy for *her* people’s plight and flips the tables on Haman, ensuring the survival of her people (Esth 7–8).

Yet, it is important to note the continuation of Murakami’s words in this same speech:

We are all human beings, individuals transcending nationality and race and religion, fragile eggs with a solid wall called the System. To all appearances we have no hope of winning. The wall is too high, too strong—and too cold. If we have any hope of victory at all, it will have to come from our own believing in the utter uniqueness and irreplaceability of our own and others’ souls and from the warmth we gain by joining souls together.⁵¹

Community *is* resistance. Ming might have stepped forward, but he is buoyed by the love and support of his father. Sam and Cheung too demonstrate resistance in their insistence for local eggs: Cheung, because his father wanted local things for

50 Haruki Murakami, “Always on the Side of the Egg,” *Ha’aretz*, February 17, 2009, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/culture/1.5076881>.

51 Murakami, “Always on the Side of the Egg.”

local people, and Sam, for his care for his customers, only choosing the best for them, even if it costs him. Esther finds her place again, coming out as a Jew and reclaiming her people publicly (Esth 7–8). She also has the support of her uncle, Mordecai, along with all the Jews there who fast with her (4:16–17)—the act of resistance here is solidarity and robust relationship. In contrast, the Youth Guard leader is only surrounded by sycophantic followers; the king and Haman too are surrounded by incompetent, foolish, obsequious advisors—all of them are starkly alone with only institutional power to sustain them.

Humour. Humour and mockery as resistance have long been studied. Notable among theorizations of humour is M. M. Bakhtin's description of carnival culture, though there are other more contemporary examples as well.⁵² Among biblical scholars, Adele Berlin, Kenneth Craig, and the like have noted the carnivalesque nature of the book of Esther.⁵³ As Craig notes,

laughing at another's discourse is a means of deflating authority, of drawing near what had been distant, of unmasking what had functioned as a veil. The carnival world is permeated with collective gaiety that destroys every form of authority, and communal laughter is fundamentally opposed to all hierarchies. This laughter is a subversive force, one which liberates victims from the restrictions of a prevailing order.

Based upon Arthur Berger's list of what qualifies as humour, this next section will discuss the ways humour is used in "Local Egg" to illuminate insights in the Book of Esther.⁵⁴ In the third scene, when Sam's shop is inspected by the Youth Guard, he is told that he has broken the rules.

SAM: Which rule did I break?

LEADER: Commander said all the words on this list need to be recorded.

SAM: Even selling eggs is illegal?

LEADER: No, selling eggs is no problem, but the word "local" is against the rules.

52 Cf. Eric Bentley, "The Psychology of Farce," in *Let's Get a Divorce and Other Plays* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958); M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); C. Powell and G. E. C. Paton, *Humour in Society: Resistance and Control* (London: MacMillan, 1988); S. B. Rodrigues and D. L. Collinson, "'Having Fun'? Humour as Resistance in Brazil," *Organization Studies* 16 (1995): 739–68; Arthur A. Berger, *Blind Men and Elephants: Perspectives on Humour* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1995); A. A. Berger, *An Anatomy of Humour* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1998).

53 Cf. Adele Berlin, *Esther*, JPC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001); Kenneth Craig, *A Case for Literary Carnavalesque* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

54 Berger, *Blind Men*, 54–55.

SAM: OK, let me ask you. What does “local” mean?
 LEADER: From Hong Kong.
 SAM: So, what does “local eggs” mean?
 LEADER: Eggs from Hong Kong.
 SAM: So, if I wrote “Hong Kong eggs,” would there be a problem?
LEADER consults his list.
 LEADER: Hong Kong . . . no problem.
 SAM (picks up an egg): This same egg . . . if it’s labelled “local egg” it’s problematic, but it’s fine when it’s a “Hong Kong egg”? Where’s the logic in that?
 LEADER: I don’t know. Anyway, I’m going to record anything against the rules.⁵⁵

Sam exposes the absurdity through repartee that “local” is banned but not “Hong Kong”—when the two phrases in this context mean the same thing. Moreover, the Youth Guard leader is unreasonably rigid, understanding the point that Sam is making but sticking to his instructions literally and dogmatically. This is a point of unmasking: Sam exposes the system for its fixation on legality and punishment. The Youth Guard is also portrayed as a buffoon and is in some ways caricaturised: this is especially seen in his brusque manner, and his walk away from the shop is an ambling waddle, perhaps playing on the stereotype of corrupt officials as more rotund.⁵⁶ His movements also appear mechanised, which invites the audience to laugh (perhaps incredulously) and to note the absurdity of the entire encounter.⁵⁷

The imperial complex in Esther is displayed in a similar buffoonish fashion. Though the audience is told of the greatness of the king through the sheer wealth of the empire on full display (1:1–4), the king himself is impotent. He is seen drunk, relying on sycophantic advisors, and unable to decide on his own without consultation. His folly is demonstrated not only in his reliance on his advisors, but also in making significant decisions drunk.

It is also absurd how much of his time is consumed by the decision to choose another wife, given that he has to choose himself based on his own pleasure (four years have passed between Esther’s crowning and the beginning of the story) (1:3; 2:16). As David Firth writes, “every attempt at shoring up power and prestige that does not exist shows how vacuous it is.”⁵⁸ Supporting him are advisors who are no

⁵⁵ *Ten Years*.

⁵⁶ Cf. Bradley S. Greenberg and et al., “Portrayals of Overweight and Obese Individuals on Commercial Television,” *American Journal of Public Health* 93 (2003): 1342–48.

⁵⁷ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. C. Brereton and F. Rothwell (Kobenhavn: Green Integer, 1911), 32.

⁵⁸ David Firth, *The Message of Esther*, BST (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 44.

better; one wonders how this empire ran at all given the incompetence of the king's advisors—particularly given Memukan's advice, which is based not on legal precedent but patriarchal precedent.⁵⁹ Haman, the one advisor at which we are given a closer look, is a raging narcissist who flies into infantile tantrums at Mordecai's refusal to bow down to him (3:5–6; 5:9–14).

Finally, the last interaction of “Local Egg” between Sam and his son Ming displays the ridiculousness of the rules. Taking place in the secret apartment where all the banned literature has been kept, Sam walks to the back of the apartment where Ming has seated himself, reading a comic book.

SAM: How can they think they can ban things from existence?

MING: Right? Even Doraemon is banned. Idiots!⁶⁰

Doraemon is a popular Japanese manga and anime for children; it has been a quintessential part of multiple generations of Hong Kong childhoods and is embedded in Hong Kong culture.⁶¹ Doraemon is an earless robot cat who is sent back in time to his master's ancestor, Nobita Nobi, in order to rescue him from his bullies, secure his future, and thus change the fates of his descendants. Nobita Nobi is unrelentingly mundane, and much of the joy derived from this manga is how ordinary its protagonists are (minus Doraemon) but also how much they just want to help the people around them and make things right.

Thus, Ming's reaction, 傻㗎 (*so4 gaa4*), which is translated as “Idiots!”, makes sense. But, more fully, 㗎 (*so4*) carries the semantic range of “foolish, silly, stupid, and nonsensical,” while the final particle 㗎 (*gaa4*) is used to indicate an assertion of emphasis. And Ming's tonality indicates that it is also a rhetorical question. Altogether, Ming's last exclamation rightfully points out the absurdity of the rules of the empire, stooping so low as to ban a children's cartoon that is about ordinary people given means to do extraordinary things, helping other ordinary people. It is also possible that this absurdity is what made Ming consider resisting in the first place, given his love for Doraemon.

Similarly, the issuing of edicts and the norms around this legality are farcical. First, the edict issued in Esther 1:21–22 is “unenforceable, if not downright silly, even a farce.”⁶² The king cannot possibly enforce that a man be master in his own house. Haman's edict, Berlin argues, is equally ridiculous, given the “tolerance of the Persian empire.”⁶³ Finally, the rigidity of the king's decrees is absurd: how can

59 Taylor, *Ruth, Esther*, 107.

60 *Ten Years*.

61 “Hong Kong celebrates 100 years before the birth of Doraemon with exhibition,” *AP Entertainment*, August 14, 2012, <http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/youtube/52d64fe809ee193ecd56521bb7e7cd8d>.

62 Berlin, *Esther*, 20.

63 Berlin, *Esther*, 20.

a king have the power to issue but not retract an edict (8:7–8)? The inconsistencies jar the reader out of complacency with regards to the imperial complex and enable sympathising with the protagonists in their quest for liberation or, at the very least, survival.

The use of space. Whereas open, light spaces are often seen as safe, in “Local Egg” it is the dark and the enclosed, tucked away spaces that are safe and illuminating. Sam’s conversation with Cheung is in the open and in the light, though thrum with tension over Cheung’s farm’s closure, and similarly Sam’s confrontation with the Youth Guard ringleader, Ming’s posse inspecting the bookstore, and the egging of the bookstore all occur in the daytime. Ming makes sure that no one is around him when he sneaks the banned list into a comic book entitled, *The Prophecy of Death* (死亡預言). But the movement towards intimacy and freedom happen in the evening: Sam pleads with Ming to think for himself, and Ming looks with trust at his father (though certainly there is still ambiguity as to how Ming will respond). Finally, the secret library is seen as the ambiguous place on the way to liberation—where people are free to read and express their thoughts without fear of censorship and retribution, but where real fear of the outside remains.

In Esther, the upstairs/downstairs, inside/outside divide is worth paying attention to. First, the upstairs or the upper space seems to be reserved for those with power and authority—Haman is literally elevated above the other officials (3:1). The royal chambers cannot be entered without permission or unless one has special status (Esther in 4:11 versus Haman in 6:4–5). This power, however, is hollow; those with power have no restraint, and those supposedly powerless manipulate the powerful with ease. The inside of the palace is resplendent and is the centre of power. Yet the inside is contested; Esther’s position is tenuous while Haman is established. Esther has no access to news of the kingdom; Haman facilitates the events that stimulate news. The king makes no decisions of his own.

But the space that is most significant in the book of Esther is the in-between, the liminal space: the gate (which was most likely an “enormous thoroughfare separating the palace from the rest of Susa”⁶⁴). Here, an assassination plot is foiled; it is where the conflict between Haman and Mordecai builds. It is a place where someone like Mordecai—who is both of the Persian Empire and also not—can exist; and it is also the place where the most promise for mobility upward as well as greatest danger occurs. Like the secret library, it is the place where one can make a play for liberation, even while the threat of imperial power is immediate.

Memory and story as resistance. One of the characteristics of imperialism is the unmitigated disregard for the memory and the history of the conquered, and

64 Brown, *Esther*, §6.3.2.

the re-creation of the subject into the imperialist's image.⁶⁵ As such, texts, memory, and story are vital to the path of resistance. And when they are told, they particularise the context such that the hegemonic story is unveiled for the lie that it is—a particularisation that seeks to expand beyond its limits and devour all others. In "Local Egg," the Youth Guard Commander's letter to parents attempts to break the story, telling them that they will not be informed by the Youth Guard Commander of their children's covert operations. This is a nod to life under authoritarian regimes, where children report on their parents, breaking the ties between generations and reshaping children into the empire's image while the parents are discarded. But Sam and Ming have a strong bond, and Ming still listens to his father, while Sam trusts his son with the wisdom he is disclosing.

The secret library cannot be glossed over; the banned texts—including Doraemon—remind HongKongers who they are. The director of the short was intentional, too, about signalling text as resistance with posters of Che, Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, Stanley Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange*, and a yellow umbrella. Also in the secret library, Sam tells Lam, "Please, never get used to [oppression]. It's precisely because our generation got used to it that you have to live like this now."⁶⁶ Yet, there is incredible hope because the next generation holds on—from Lam and other patrons opening a secret library to Ming clutching his Doraemon comics, recognizing that they indeed are "living in an evil time" and choosing to be the (ordinary) people, given extraordinary means, stepping up for such a time as this.

As for the Book of Esther, there was previous discussion about multi-hyphenation as bowing to the imperial, but simultaneously, it is also resistance because it actively defies assimilation, signalling that one's identity is not entirely subsumed into the imperial complex. Similarly, Esther's name (אֶסְתֵּר) might be read to mean "I will hide" or I am hiding" if following the Talmud; אֶסְתֵּר could be translated as the first person *qal* imperfect form of the verb "to hide."⁶⁷ This might be interpreted hopefully, as an indicator that God is indeed behind the coincidences and working behind the scenes. Erica Brown also interprets the hiddenness motif (continued in Mordecai asking Esther to conceal her identity) as a deliberate act in order to "reveal the real relationship between God and the Israelites when they are not dependent upon God for every need . . . [as well as] Mordecai . . . asking her to embody as a leader, the condition of her people in exile."⁶⁸ Further, this act of concealment might serve to help differentiate who one truly is and make possible "a confrontation with the inner self."⁶⁹

65 Said, *Culture*, 105–109.

66 *Ten Years*.

67 Beal, *Esther*, 30.

68 Brown, *Esther*, §7.2.4.

69 Brown, *Esther*, §7.2.4.

But for all that the land motif and God are not mentioned, the book of Esther is replete with imagery that draws from the larger Jewish tradition—the nod to the historical enmity between the Israelites and the Amalekites, establishing Mordecai as of King Saul’s line, as well as other hints of the Deuteronomistic tradition (1 Sam 15; Deut 21:22–23; Josh 8:29, 10:26–27, etc.) As Levenson indicates, this text might also serve to expand the exodus motif such that any rescue from empire can be seen as an exodus and introduces the concept that “shrewd statesmen were at least as essential to survival as were prophets.”⁷⁰ This text, in other words, carves out a new theology for the Jewish Diaspora as they contemplate what promise there can be outside of the land of Israel.

The temple, too, looms large in the text. The first is in the description of the palace, recalling the reader to the splendour of the temple and the visible reminder of the temple’s absence. But this absence creates an important contrast to the palace, reminding the people of God that Ahasuerus, for all his wealth and splendour, is not God. The second is the participial noun complement and the absolute noun following, שַׁמְרֵי הַסֵּף (“who guarded the threshold”), which is most often used in reference to the temple (Esth 2:21, 6:2; cf. 2 Kgs 12:9, 22:4, 23:4, 25:18; Jer 52:24; 2 Chr 34:9). Finally, meta-textually, Purim holds the book of Esther at the very centre of its celebration; and the command is not to remember the conquering of their enemies but to celebrate in gladness and joy (Esth 9:18–19). The re-telling of stories is powerful because it reminds a people that the imperial complex cannot rob them of their joy, so long as they remember who they are.

Decolonising: Towards or Away from Empire?

The danger occurs when power is mistaken for liberation—and the postcolonial trajectory often results in, yes, decolonisation, but also re-colonisation or neo-colonisation.⁷¹ This happens because there is insufficient critical reflection on decolonisation, but also because it fails to take seriously the ideological hold the imperial complex has on subject peoples. Put another way, the aspiration of empire does not topple empire; it merely moves another empire into its place, and imperialism occurs all over again. And, as evidenced by the texts, there is no one way forward to decolonisation.

Indeed, while the efforts of Mordecai and Esther ensured the survival of their people, they took on the same power of the imperial complex that previously had been used to oppress them. Rather than overturning the imperial complex, they used imperial power to suppress another colonised people’s machinations within that same system, thereby committing the very same destruction that was almost

⁷⁰ Levenson, “Scroll of Esther,” 449.

⁷¹ Chen, *Asia as Method*, 63.

committed against them (8:11–13; 9:1–17). By becoming part of the system, they have become part of the oppressive structures.

Perhaps “Local Egg” might offer a possible way forward towards decolonisation. The resistance posters in the secret library serve to remind HongKongers that they are not alone in their resistance. This film also strangely forecasts the Milk Tea Alliance with the nod to both Cheung moving to Taiwan as well as Sam looking to replace his local eggs with Thai eggs.⁷² And while HongKongers have been accused of appealing to the West for help, this film draws from the strength of Japanese pacifism—Haruki Murakami and Doraemon, formed in the post-war era as the Japanese people came to grips with their involvement in World War II—that has seeped into the very fibre of Hong Kong culture.

In sum, the way forward lies not in buying into imperial power but in creating alliances with other colonised peoples and locating the new narrative by re-drawing the map, centring and privileging colonised people’s stories. This is the work of community as resistance. It also means that colonised peoples have the hard work of lessening the imperial desire, so that reconciliation, integration, and independence might be possible.⁷³ This might be done, as it is in Esther and in “Local Egg,” by celebrating and revelling in the particular and resisting the urge to universalise and gain imperial power for themselves.

Conclusion

In sum, “Local Egg” brings a contemporary example to bear of a context currently dealing with the present danger and uncertainty of living in an imperial world, and thus illuminates the book of Esther by drawing out key postcolonial themes. Conversely, the book of Esther speaks back into “Local Egg,” showing ways forward of surviving amidst empire while tangibly warning of the danger of becoming part of the imperial complex. This paper has discussed the totalising force of imperialism, the types of compliance and resistance, as well as a possible way forward in decolonisation. It also has concretely illustrated that the scriptures still have something to say today and perhaps are more pertinent now than ever. Finally, just because God is seemingly hidden, it does not excuse our inability to act. Perhaps, like Ming and Esther as well as Sam and Mordecai, in evil times, the ordinary people are not powerless but are called to intervene in bringing about justice and shalom in their contexts.

72 Laignee Baron, “‘We Share the Ideals of Democracy.’ How the Milk Tea Alliance Is Brewing Solidarity Among Activists in Asia and Beyond,” *TIME*, October 28, 2020, <https://time.com/5904114/milk-tea-alliance/>.

73 Chen, *Asia as Method*, 198.