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# Destination Hong Kong: Negotiating Locality in Hong Kong Novels 1945-1966

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DESTINATION HONG KONG: NEGOTIATING LOCALITY IN HONG KONG NOVELS  
1945-1966

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## ABSTRACT

Recent clashes between China and Hong Kong have attracted worldwide attention. Behind such clashes, I see anxieties over the Hong Kong identity. Based on Ackbar Abbas' theorization of the "politics of disappearance" in Hong Kong, this dissertation focuses on the postwar period in Hong Kong from 1945 to 1966. I argue going back to this historical era, which help us understand how Chineseness in Hong Kong influences people's imagination of Hong Kong. Concentrating on four novels written between 1945 and 1966, this dissertation pays close attention to the ways in which the (re)interpretations of Chineseness in these Hong Kong novels make it possible for people to find their place in Hong Kong. I contend that these various possibilities to find one's niche in postwar Hong Kong reflect the flexible locality of Hong Kong. I include fictions written both in English and Chinese, and by native Hongkongers and non-native Hongkongers. My juxtaposition of them will show that all four novels reflect how negotiations of locality in postwar Hong Kong is possible through a reinterpretation of Chineseness in Hong Kong, regardless of the different nationalities of the author, the languages of the novels, or their different focuses on the city of Hong Kong. More specifically, I analyze the nostalgia for "authentic" Chineseness as imagined by expatriate writers such as Richard Mason; the mixedness of Chinese world and western worlds in Han Suyin's Hong Kong; Lü Lun's socialistic realistic depiction of Hong Kong from the perspectives of refugees; and Liu Yichang's dilemma between his elitism as a Chinese

intellectual and the overwhelming commercialization of literature in Hong Kong. These different representations of Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s in my opinion, are negotiations between colonialist, nationalistic, and capitalistic perceptions of local Chineseness. In other words, negotiations of Chineseness make it possible for people to reinterpret their ethnicity, customs, cultures, and ultimately their identities in the city of Hong Kong.

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## INTRODUCTION

To most post-80s generations (“Baling hou,” meaning people who were born after 1980 in mainland China), Hong Kong cultural products have played an important role in their childhood and adolescence. Hong Kong TV dramas such as *Legends of The Condor Hero* 射鵬英雄傳 were imported and became an integral part of their childhood. When they entered middle school, girls began to read romantic fictions by Zhang Xiaoxian<sup>1</sup> 張小嫻 and Yi Shu 亦舒 and boys were interested in reading martial arts fictions (*wuxia xiaoshuo* 武俠小說) by Jin Yong 金庸<sup>2</sup>. Until now, Hong Kong films and popular songs have been a great means of entertainment. From the middle-school history textbooks, students from mainland China learned that Hong Kong was an inseparable part of China and after more than 150 years of cession to Britain, it would return to its motherland in 1997. Overall, their knowledge of Hong Kong was that it was a metropolis in South China, a port where East met West, and a “Pearl of the East.”

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<sup>1</sup> Overall, I use the Pinyin system for the names of Chinese and Hongkongnese authors. But for the works from which I cite, I respect the original spelling of the authors’ names, which include both the Pinyin system and the Cantonese Romanization.

<sup>2</sup> Jin Yong started serializing martial arts fictions since 1950s and his novels became canonized during the 1980s. Yi Shu and Zhang Xiaoxian started writing in 1960s and 1990s respectively and both of them have enjoyed great popularity among readers in Hong Kong and mainland China.

While these cultural products generated a romanticized imagination of Hong Kong among mainlanders, films and TV dramas in Hong Kong also produced some stereotypical images of mainlanders. In fact, the depiction of mainlanders has been common in Hong Kong films since the 1960s. According to Shi Wenhong, in many TV dramas and commercial films in Hong Kong, there was a common prejudice against mainlanders who were regarded as the “other”<sup>3</sup> (173-176). Shi also points out the changing causes for such a prejudice. He argues that in the 1960s and 1970s, mainlanders were called “bumpkins” due to economic poverty and he considers this bias represents the conflict between “urban culture and rural culture” (174). Since the 1980s, the characterization of mainlanders in many films also highlighted the cultural and political divergences between Hong Kong and China. Specifically, Hongkongers had a sense of anxiety when facing the powerful Chinese government (Shi 181). Shi points out that these stereotypical representations of mainlanders are important features of commercial films, whose major purpose is “to entertain” (183). Undoubtedly, these entertaining films at the same time have influenced the ways in which Hongkongers view themselves and people from mainland China.

A close examination of these typical images of Hong Kong and China however, will reveal how oversimplified and even “essentialistic” the mutual perceptions between

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<sup>3</sup> In many films depicting Sino-Hong Kong contact, there were derogatory terms to address mainlanders such as *Ah Can* 阿燦 and *Bei Gu* 北姑. See film *Her Fatal Ways* 表姐你好嘢 and TV drama *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* 網中人.

China and Hong Kong could be. First of all, although mainland Chinese regard Hong Kong as a Chinese city, its demography is very complicated<sup>4</sup>. Even within local Chinese population, there are people who are born and raised in Hong Kong as well as those who start as undocumented immigrants from mainland China and still speak accented Mandarin. There are also legal Hong Kong residents who have no Chinese ethnicity. Most of them can speak English and Cantonese but have no knowledge of Mandarin and no contact with China. The different backgrounds of Hong Kong people definitely influence their perceptions of China. Meanwhile, starting in 2003 when individual travel was possible for residents of certain Chinese cities, Hongkongers have had more direct contact with mainlanders, consequently transforming their perceptions of people from mainland China. With the rapid economic development in mainland China, Hong Kong people gradually lost their economic superiority and poverty is no longer the reason to look down upon mainlanders. Instead, cultural and political differences have become more remarkable.

Recent years have witnessed a lot of clashes between Hong Kong and mainland China. In 2011, a group of netizens in Hong Kong composed a song “Locust World” which was targeted at tourists from mainland China<sup>5</sup>. Many Hongkongers complain that

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<sup>4</sup> According to the 2011 Hong Kong Population Census, “94% of the population were of Chinese ethnicity. The largest non-Chinese ethnic groups in Hong Kong were Indonesians and Filipinos, both constituting 1.9% of the population” (7). In addition to these three ethnicities, the Hong Kong population also included whites and other Asians.

<sup>5</sup> The song compares mainland tourists to locusts and uses a bunch of derogatory terms to

the increasing number of tourists from China has disrupted their normal daily lives<sup>6</sup>. On September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012, after months of public demonstrations, the Hong Kong government decided to delete the part on the history of Chinese Communist Party in the textbooks of citizenship education. The biggest incident took place on September 28, 2014. Mainly due to dissatisfaction with the election system, thousands of people occupied different districts in Hong Kong under the name “Umbrella Revolution.” This movement lasted for about 80 days and triggered heated discussion on social networks such as Facebook and Weibo. Supporters argued that it was necessary to “defend” a Hong Kong identity from Communist “brainwashing” while objectors criticized Hong Kong people as “traitors” who completely discarded their Chinese identity.

There are of course complicated political, economic, social, and cultural factors in Sino-Hong Kong conflicts. However, in all these conflicts, almost all of which were started by ordinary Hong Kong residents, I do see an anxiety over the Hong Kong culture

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satirize these tourists. The Music Video is available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWZFGkJNxDm>, retrieved February 18, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> These complaints also forced the Hong Kong government to adopt new measurements to deal with more and more mainland tourists. On March 1st 2013, Hong Kong issued a new law stating that each individual could carry no more than two cans of milk powder when they left Hong Kong. This new regulation mainly aimed at buyers from mainland China who rushed to Hong Kong to purchase milk powder for its better quality and cheaper price. Their rushing to Hong Kong however, resulted in insufficient milk powder for local buyers. About one month later, on April 25th, Hong Kong announced that pregnant women were not allowed to deliver in Hong Kong if both they and their husbands had no Hong Kong residency. The overwhelming number of pregnant women from mainland China had increased the burdens for Hong Kong hospitals, which did not have enough beds for local pregnant women to deliver.

and identity. Most people were concerned that the swarming of people, capital, and culture from mainland China would eventually transform the Hong Kong society, their beliefs, value systems, and ultimately their identity as Hong Kong people<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, these incidents in Hong Kong are not only local residents' mundane appeals, but also ways in which people in Hong Kong refuse to be marginalized or assimilated by the powerful China.

The anxiety about Hong Kong identity has been a problem that constantly troubles the residents of this island. Ye Si, in his introduction to *Xianggang de liuxing wenhua* (Hong Kong Popular Culture) argues that a common way for Hong Kong authors to define their identity is through “depicting “others” (11). In other words, they do not ascertain their identity by claiming who they are, but by realizing who they are not. In the past, the mainlanders were probably the best “others” that helped define the Hong Kong identity. Nevertheless, with economic, political and even cultural “invasions” from mainland China, Hong Kong people are afraid that they will be engulfed by the Chinese power and eventually lose their unique identity.

Such an anxiety was especially perceptible during the 1980s when China and Britain started negotiating the future of Hong Kong. Indeed the Hong Kong identity has always

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<sup>7</sup> Especially in the new millennium, many scholar are concerned about the so-called mainlandization in Hong Kong in different aspects. See Shiu Hing Lo, Wai-Kwok Benson Wong, M.M Szeto and Y.C. Chen.

been under the influence of global political changes. More specifically, the perception of Hong Kong identity has been closely tied with the relationship between Hong Kong, China, and Britain. Most noticeably during the 1980s, when the *Sino-British Joint Declaration* was signed, booming debates and analysis about the concept of Hong Kong identity swept the Hong Kong society. Literary creation, cinematic production, photographic representation, architecture, and even pop music tried to negotiate the Hong Kong identity. These cultural productions in Hong Kong also attracted sufficient academic attention, and the wave of cultural studies in the 1990s in turn called into question the clichéd saying that Hong Kong is a “cultural desert.”<sup>8</sup>

In all the scholarly writings, which attempt to tackle with the characteristics of Hong Kong culture, Ackbar Abbas’ 1997 book *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of*

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of “cultural desert” came out during the 1960s when economy rocketed. Yet the economic boom also caused a lot of social problems, the loss of social norms and ethics. Most scholars were desperate about the future for Hong Kong literature and culture. Liu Yichang is one among the first to explicitly criticize the morbid literary environment in Hong Kong in his fiction *Jiutu* (The Drunkard) His contemporaries more or less shared similar point of views in their commentaries on Liu’s novel. See 酒徒評論選集 (*Selections of Commentaries on Jiutu*). In the 1980s, however, scholars began to reexamine the validity of this term. A great deal of effort has been put on a redefinition of “culture” which is not limited to high-brow cultural forms, but rather includes cultural production that can promote local identity. Such awareness of locality has become especially distinctive after 1997 when China officially took over its sovereignty of Hong Kong. Ideological and economical differences have propelled local artists to preserve the “spirits” of Hong Kong in their productions. Mariana Szeto and Yun-chung Chen have a very good analysis of the awareness of locality in post-1997 Hong Kong films. See. Szeto and Chen, “Mainlandization or Sinophone Translocality? Challenges for Hong Kong SAR New Wave Cinema.” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 6.2 (2012): 115-134.

*Disappearance* is one of the most influential. First of all, His book offers a comprehensive reading of Hong Kong's urban space, modernity and locality through close analysis of various cultural forms such as literature, architecture, and films. Moreover, Abbas also sees a unique marking of the Hong Kong culture, which he terms as the politics of "disappearance." Abbas argues that at the *fin de siècle* Hong Kong was trapped in a space of disappearance, the process of which approximately initiated in 1982, the year when China and Britain started negotiating the future of Hong Kong. Abbas's definition of "disappearance" does not mean the invisibility of Hong Kong culture. Rather it is a hyphenated "dis-appearance," a "pathology of existence," and "a question of misrecognition, of recognizing a thing as something else" (7-8). There are two layers of meaning underlying the politics of "disappearance." On the one hand, with the coming of the year 1997, Hong Kong foresees the disappearance of a colonial age. What might also be disappearing are cultural productions such as films, literature, and architectures, which were produced during this age. Together with this sense of disappearance, "the question of subjectivity" which is often misleadingly posed as the question of "Hong Kong identity" will also problematize representation and self-representation of Hong Kong (10). In other words, when Hong Kong is handed over to China, there is a possibility that anxiety will emerge among Hongkongers in terms of "who they are." On the other hand, the politics of disappearance push cultural productions in Hong Kong to contemplate on the possibility of a new cultural space,

which goes beyond the British and Chinese cultural realms through the development of “a subjectivity constructed not narcissistically but in the very process of negotiating the mutations and permutations of colonialism, nationalism, and capitalism” (11). Therefore, Abbas argues that in such a fast-changing era, no fixed identity is able to last.

Now about twenty years after Abbas published this book, his “prediction” about people’s obsession/anxiety with the question of “Hong Kong identity” comes true. Going back to his analysis of the new subjectivity might provide us some clues to better understand the current anxiety among Hongkongers over the disappearance of their identity. In Abbas’ discussion, he mentions films, literature, architecture, and even photos as ways in which people negotiate a new subjectivity. However, his examples do not seem to relate to ordinary Hongkongers. Why is the case? Gordon Matthews in his review ascribes the failure of the book to arouse resonance among common readers to the silencing of Hong Kong itself. He writes, Abbas “brings so little of Hong Kong into the book ... He does not describe Hong Kong, or Hong Kong cinema, architecture, and literature as experienced by most Hong Kong people” (1113). That is to say, Abbas’s expatriate feeling is overwhelming in his book and thus his views on the problem of identity and ways to negotiate a new subjectivity might not be shared by Hong Kong people. Matthews seems to indicate that there is essential difference between an expatriate’s cultural experience and local Hongkongers’ feelings. I think this point of view has its merits, as well as some problems.



First of all, I do not believe there is a unique cultural experience that is exclusive to the Hong Kong people. At the first place, how could we define Hong Kong people? Should we only include people who are born and raised in Hong Kong? Exclusion of experiences of people who are not “native” Hongkongers is against what Abbas argues in the book. In his analysis of cultural productions about Hong Kong, Abbas includes not only “local” directors and writers, such as Stanley Kwan and Louise Ho, but also Chinese American architect I. M. Pei who designed the Bank of China Tower, and Lu Xun, who is among the first Chinese authors to write about Hong Kong. Therefore, in Abbas’ analysis, neither the cultural productions nor experiences of these productions are exclusive to “native” Hongkongers.

That said, I do agree with Matthews that something important is missing in Abbas’ discussion, i.e., the historical contextualization of the process during which Hong Kong evolves into a space of disappearance. There is no doubt that the ways in which Hong Kong is placed between Britain and China, between its preservation of Chinese traditions and its gradual westernization, should be historically contextualized. I argue that only by returning to the historical period before a Hong Kong identity was established (for many people, Hong Kong identity did not come into being until the 1970s)<sup>9</sup> could we

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<sup>9</sup> The emergence of Hong Kong identity for many people resulted from Hong Kong’s estrangement from China, as a result of historical events. Politically speaking, a series of anti-colonial riots led by leftists in Hong Kong broke out in 1966 and 1967. These riots made the colonial government realize the potential threat from the communist China and

comprehend the extent to which a negotiation between colonialism, nationalism and capitalism is possible. I have two major reasons. Firstly, I see great similarities between the last two decades in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the years between 1945 and 1966<sup>10</sup>. More specially, I contend that during both time periods, Hong Kong was a city of “disappearance.” According to Abbas, features of a “disappearing” Hong Kong include a strong sense of transients, a misrecognition of political idealism under the camouflage of economic development, uncertainties about autonomy and dependency, and a possible demise of the local culture (4-7). A close examination of these characteristics will tell that they were not only remarkable in the 1980s, but were traceable in post-WWII Hong Kong.

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changed the colonial policies by putting more effort to foster a sense of belonging to Hong Kong among local residents. This sense of belonging was propagandized through popular media, as well as benefiting policies. Especially after Sir Murray Maclehoose took office, he took active measures to improve the living standards and social welfare including public housing, medical care, education, and protection of the working class. In contrast to the political and economic reforms in Hong Kong, situations in China deteriorated during the Cultural Revolution, disillusionizing immigrants who originally treated Hong Kong merely as a transitional haven. Accompanying political and economic divergences between Hong Kong and China, the spread of mass culture was also made possible due to the development of television broadcasting (Choi 11-30). Gu Shumei also summarizes that “fear of communism” 恐共 and “urbanization” 都市化 were two pivotal factors that generated the local identity in the 1970s (349-355).

<sup>10</sup> Xie Juncai divides postwar Hong Kong into five historical periods: 1945-1949 was a period of recovery and restoration; 1950-1967 witnessed separation from China and economic takeoff; the decade between 1968-1978 was a period when the so-called Hong Kong identity emerged; 1979-1997 was a period of decolonization; and finally after 1997, Hong Kong officially became a Special Administrative Region of China (7). His classification is mainly based on the different zeitgeist of each historical period but I sort out the twenty-first years from 1945 to 1966, because I consider it has significant impact on the formation of Hong Kong identity.

Between 1945 and 1967, massive flows of immigrants, capitals, and political ideologies came into play, resulting in dramatic demographic, economic, political, and cultural changes and transitions. According to Victor F. S. Sit's survey, Hong Kong has witnessed three great peaks of immigration in postwar periods in 1962, 1973, and 1979<sup>11</sup>. The 1960s also marked the beginning of "Hongkongese massive immigration to the West" mainly because of fear of the Cultural Revolution and communism (Acon-Chan 31). Postwar Hong Kong also enjoyed rapid economic growth. On the one hand, Hong Kong became the economic window for China during U.S. embargo and blockade. Meanwhile, it was also a trading port that attracted American merchandise and capital. From a political perspective, The Cold War made the struggles of political ideologies extremely intensive, and Hong Kong became "a target of competition and occupation by the two rivals, China and Taiwan, as well as by foreign powers" (Tay 34). During the Cold War and the years after the *Joint Declaration*, Hong Kong suffered from similar political uncertainties in terms of their position to the ruling countries—namely Britain and China—and this inevitably challenged the representation of identity, which is "a

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<sup>11</sup> Sit's study of the demographic change in Hong Kong starts with the 1960s because no official data on immigration in the 1950s is available. However, it should be reasonable to assume that a great number of immigrants flew to Hong Kong after WWII because during this Cold War period, multiple wars broke out, including the Chinese Civil War, which ended in 1949, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Hong Kong was not involved in those wars and maintained a relatively peaceful environment, thus becoming an ideal haven in the East. Immigrants who arrived in Hong Kong between 1950s and 1960s included refugees from China and South Asia, the bourgeois class in China, and the Western expatriates (p.3).

product of the popular imagination—and imagination is circumscribed by ideology” (Turner and Ngan 24). In other words, the changing interactions between China, Britain, and Hong Kong have been the driving force for people in Hong Kong to renegotiate their own identity.

Regardless of these similarities, there are also differences between the two historical periods. The most significant one is that to the majority people living in postwar Hong Kong, a Hong Kong identity did not exist. The non-existence of such an identity is the second reason why I consider it necessary for us to return to that period. Currently, to many Hongkongers, the major confusion about the Hong Kong identity is the “conflicting self-images” between “a confident assertion of indigenous culture” and “China’s de-politicized, ambiguous and seemingly superficial reconstruction of their identity as a “life style” (Turner and Ngan 24-29). In other words, the Chinese government consciously challenges the validity of a local identity, reducing it to one of the many lifestyles in different parts of the country. I agree there is political agenda in such reductive interpretation of the Hong Kong identity. My question, however, is how does this “confident assertion of indigenous culture” come into being in the first place? In my opinion, the process during which a Hong Kong identity gradually formed cannot be separated from various impacts from China. In fact, China has been constantly involved in the emergence of a local culture in Hong Kong, which is indispensable in the formation of the Hong Kong identity.

To understand the relationship between China and Hong Kong, we have to go back to the history when Hong Kong and China were separated. In 1842, Hong Kong was ceded to Britain after China lost the first Opium War. Under the British colonial rule, Hong Kong developed from a barren fishing village to a metropolitan city. Economically speaking, Hong Kong has joined the world market and capitalism swept Hong Kong long before China opened up in 1978. Despite economic divergence, Hong Kong has maintained a cultural link with China. Chinese languages, traditions, and cultural beliefs have dominated the Hong Kong society. The reason why Hong Kong has been able to maintain the Chinese culture is multifold. Geographically, Hong Kong is very close to mainland China. A more important factor lies in the non-interventional approach of the colonial government. According to Steve Tsang, to a great extent the occupation of Hong Kong was a result of economic concerns. The island of Hong Kong, which was originally considered as “a barren island with hardly a house upon it” turned out to be a “valuable base to support the British trading community in Canton” (11-14). Britain by no means wanted to politically and culturally conquer this island, and local laws (i.e. the law of Qing Dynasty) and customs were adopted to rule the local population. Before the 1960s when the British authority faced challenges, the major concern of colonial rule lied in economic development.

Things began to change since 1970s. As I argued above, the so-called Hong Kong identity is generally considered to have emerged and consolidated during the 1970s,

following economic takeoff and cultural events that created a sense of belonging.

According to Y P Choi, the two most distinguished factors that contribute to the emergence of a Hong Kong identity in the 1970s are: first, Hong Kong's connections with China were greatly loosened; and second, the concept of locality was advocated (11). However, I argue that the existence of Chineseness in Hong Kong is an indispensable force for such identity formation. To me, China's influences on Hong Kong include not only its geographical closeness, economical relevance, and political impact. More importantly, due to the existence of China, Hong Kong becomes a space where a renegotiation of one's identity is possible and even necessary. There are historical factors contributing to such a possibility. During the years between 1945 and 1966, economic and political gaps between China and Hong Kong began to broaden. On the other hand, the cultural link between China and Hong Kong has never stopped<sup>12</sup>. As a result, the depiction of Hong Kong during these two decades is always already embedded in a (mis)reading of Chineseness to serve specific political, economic and ideological purposes. Representation of Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s, thus is a negotiation between colonialist, nationalistic, and capitalistic perceptions of local Chineseness. This

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<sup>12</sup> Chinese and English are two official languages in Hong Kong. But according to the 2011 Census, more than 90% of Hong Kong population are able to speak Cantonese, about 48% can speak Mandarin, compared to 42% who are able to speak English (14). Most writers in Hong Kong write in Chinese and Cantonese is the major language for Hong Kong films. Overall, the cultural production in Hong Kong has been made in Chinese (dialects).

does not mean, however, that Hong Kong is overwhelmed by China. On the contrary, negotiations of Chineseness make it possible for people to reinterpret their ethnicity, customs, cultures, and ultimately their identities in the city of Hong Kong.

To understand how Chineseness in Hong Kong influences people's imagination of Hong Kong, this dissertation will look at four novels written between 1945 and 1966. I will pay close attention to the ways in which the (re)interpretations of Chineseness in these Hong Kong novels make it possible for people to find their place in Hong Kong. These various possibilities to find one's niche in postwar Hong Kong reflect the flexible locality 本土性 of Hong Kong. Before I go into details of each chapter, there are two concepts that I want to clarify: Hong Kong novels and locality.

Cultural forms are various but probably no one would deny the importance of literature. When it comes to Hong Kong literature, however, it has not received enough attention. For instance, in contrast to his comprehensive analysis of Hong Kong films, Abbas does not pay enough attention to literature<sup>13</sup>. But if we are to have a better understanding of Hong Kong culture, literature is a field that we cannot afford to ignore. The 1970s is generally considered to be the golden age for the first generation of Hong

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<sup>13</sup> His insufficient discussion of Hong Kong literature results from multiple factors. 1980s and 1990s is generally regarded as the "golden age" for Hong Kong film industry, which witnessed both box office increase and an expansion of overseas influence (Chu 53-56). Therefore, it is reasonable for Abbas to put his emphasis on films. His unfamiliarity with the Chinese language, the language for most Hong Kong literature, also explains why he does not include many Chinese authors.

Kong local authors such as Xi Xi and Ye Si, who were raised and grew up in postwar Hong Kong. Even before the 1970s, literature had never been dormant in Hong Kong. According to Lai Sai Acón-Chan, “the 1950s and 1960s, was a very active period for the literature written in Chinese” due to the prosperous development of newspaper industry (32). Political struggles played a significant role in the development of Hong Kong literature<sup>14</sup>. Writings of Hong Kong by expatriates<sup>15</sup> were also common since the 19th century.

Regardless of the richness of Hong Kong literature, it did not attract much scholarly attention until mid-1970s, and it is only after the 1980s that scholars outside Hong Kong began to pay more attention to it (Lo, 1989 61-64). However, thus far, there is still an ongoing debate about what Hong Kong literature is and there is no consensus in terms of the definition of Hong Kong literature 香港文學. There are currently two major camps. Research on Hong Kong literature began to boom in the PRC after mid-1980s after the signing of the *Sino-British Joint Declaration*. To celebrate that Hong Kong’s return to China, mainland scholars tried to strengthen the literary connections between Hong Kong

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<sup>14</sup> See *In Search of Hong Kong Literature*. William Tay argues that the struggle between leftist and rightist writers was immediately involved in the ideological war during the Cold War period. Their writings, even though were not created merely to serve political purposes, were used as propaganda. Each camp had their specific magazines to publish these writings. These writers and magazines also received direct financial support from both China and the United States. Ironically, regardless of the political involvement during the 1950s and 1960s, literary production in Hong Kong was highly prosperous.

<sup>15</sup> The most famous expatriate authors include Austin Coates, James Clavell, and Richard Mason, to name just a few.



and mainland China. Much emphasis is put on the ways in which Chinese literature influenced the literary development in China, especially during WWII. Refusing to be bracketed as a part of Chinese literature, scholars in Hong Kong offer several definitions of Hong Kong literature, which adopt various judging standards. Wong Wang-chi in his article “How to Define Hong Kong Literature: A Primary Question for the Writing of Hong Kong Literary History” offers a detailed overview of three definitions proposed by Huang Weiliang, Liu Yichang, and Xu Zidong. Their varied standards mainly include the nationality of the author (namely whether they have Hong Kong residency) and the physical location of the author when s/he completes his/her writings (whether the writing process is finished in Hong Kong or not). Wong’s own argument is that it is impossible to define Hong Kong literature because “Hong Kong literature is hybrid,” but he also acknowledges that it is “quite a shame” that there is no successful Hong Kong literary history because of the failure to notice the specificity and hybridity of Hong Kong literature while putting too much focus on a grand blueprint of Hong Kong writing (39). Regardless of all these differences, Wong and the scholars he discusses in his article, tend to have reached consensus on at least one major point—that the writing has to be in the Chinese language.

In Abbas’ analysis of Hong Kong literature, he divides Hong Kong literature into two groups: “writing Hong Kong” and “Hong Kong writing” so as to justify his juxtaposition of Lu Xun, a mainland author who writes in Chinese and Louise Ho, a

Hong Kong poet who writes in English. Although he does not deny the difference between these two categories, his classification of Hong Kong literature is not merely based on the language of writing, but rather on the authors' attempts to defy the cultural space of disappearance in Hong Kong. No wonder Abbas regards both Lu Xun and Louise Ho, who have very different representations of Hong Kong, as successful and serious literary figures in Hong Kong's literary history. Like Abbas, Shu-mei Shih finds the multilingual writing in Hong Kong a perfect model of the Sinophone literature because its employment of multiple languages testifies the "localness of this literature," which is to say, Hong Kong literature "has always been a multilingual literature, including Anglophone and Sinophone writings" (14, 15). In other words, we cannot neglect writings in English if we are to understand Hong Kong literature because it is indeed the multiplicity of languages that makes Hong Kong literature what it is. My selection of the four novels, like that of Abbas and Shih, is not based on the nationality of the author or the language of the writing. Instead, I consider all these novels contribute to our understanding of the changing locality of Hong Kong.

Locality is the second concept that I need to clarify. In a common sense, locality refers to local features in certain places. However, in contemporary Hong Kong studies, locality is a heavily loaded term. According to Abbas, Hong Kong locality has its quintessence in the "politics of disappearance." Shih's categorization of Hong Kong literature as a specific branch within Sinophone literature is another way to emphasize the

locality or uniqueness of Hong Kong literature. The reason why locality means so much in Hong Kong can be found in Rey Chow's famous description of Hong Kong's position. According to Chow, Hong Kong is "an anomaly in postcoloniality" because it is trapped between both two colonizers, i.e., the British and the Chinese (Chow, "Between Colonizers" 151). She argues that the end of British rule in 1997 would not end coloniality in Hong Kong. China becomes the new colonizer for Hong Kong, making postcoloniality impossible because it is not very likely for Hong Kong to gain independence from China. While in the past, Hong Kong has not submitted to British colonialism; likewise, it would be impossible for Hong Kong to submit to Chinese nationalist/nativist repossession<sup>16</sup>. The awkward position of Hong Kong needs conscious self-writing that can possibly go beyond this double impossibility. The underlying meaning of self-writing is to problematize the representation of Hong Kong literature under either the Western eyes or the Chinese national discourse—or in Chow's words, to "split Chineseness" and "problematize *whiteness*" (italics original, 8-10). Therefore, Hong Kong locality is a way to replace the western and Chinese discourses.

It is debatable whether China should be viewed as the new colonizer of Hong Kong.

What I find problematic in Chow's argument of Hong Kong's entrapment between two

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<sup>16</sup> While Chow was writing in early 1990s, her concern about the tension between Hong Kong and the PRC proves to be quite accurate. Many local citizens still share her opinion and argue for more autonomy for Hong Kong. The incidents that I mentioned at the beginning are some of the examples.

colonizers—if we accept coloniality in the way that she defines it—is her listing of the British and Chinese colonization in Hong Kong in a chronological order. In fact, China has “colonized” Hong Kong long before Britain left. The interactions between China and Hong Kong have never stopped. More ironically, China the new colonizer has been perceived as both politically and economically “underdeveloped<sup>17</sup>.” The effort to emphasize the locality, in my opinion, therefore, requires an “otherization” of China, highlighting the differences between the so-called “colonizers” and the “colonized.” The logic behind the discourse that emphasizes locality of Hong Kong also resembles the antagonistic dualistic logic, which is exactly what is behind colonization and imperialization. If we treat Hong Kong locality as something essential and fixed, it would mean a misinterpretation of Chineseness in terms of its role in the formation of the so-called Hong Kong locality. In fact, essentializing certain features as Hong Kong locality would at the same time otherizing Chineseness without realizing the historical causes for economic, political and cultural interactions/divergences between Hong Kong and the PRC. If we only focus on writings that promote an essentialized reading of Hong Kong locality, a lot of other literary representations would be neglected because they might not fit into such an essentialized concept of locality. After all, what contemporary readers see as the unique features of Hong Kong have developed under specific historical

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<sup>17</sup> When Hong Kong gradually loses its economic superiority to mainland China in recent years, more criticism is on the “uncivilized” behaviors of the mainlanders.

circumstances. Therefore, my interpretation of locality does not concentrate on how it represents the zeitgeist of the current Hong Kong society. Rather, I argue that the Hong Kong locality is best represented by the changing interactions between Hong Kong and its “colonizers.” More specifically, Hong Kong locality means the possibility to always negotiate “between colonizers” and it is this locality that I will explore in my dissertation.

I will examine four novels that reveal the mechanism of Hong Kong locality in the period between 1945 and 1966. I include fictions written both in English and Chinese, and by native Hongkongers and non-native Hongkongers. Some of the novels are well-recognized as Hong Kong novels while others are excluded either because of the language of writing, or their alleged failure to represent the “authentic” Hong Kong locality. My juxtaposition of them will show that all four novels reflect how negotiations of locality in postwar Hong Kong is possible through a reinterpretation of Chineseness in Hong Kong, regardless of the different nationalities of the author, the languages of the novels, or their different focuses on the city of Hong Kong.

My first chapter explores the representation of Hong Kong in Richard Mason’s 1957 novel *The World of Suzie Wong*. This novel is often labeled as orientalist because in the novel Hong Kong and local women are under the Western gaze. This chapter reads against this common interpretation by dissecting the dualistic antagonism between Hong Kong and Britain. To achieve this, this chapter reads the representation of Hong Kong through the western eyes together with an exploration of the stimulating imagination of

China in Mason's writing. Specifically I focus on the character Suzie and her relationship with Robert Lomax, her British patron, and the extent to which this seemingly colonialist novel defies a conventional (post)colonial interpretation. The characterization of Suzie and the depiction of this "East-West" love relationship are based on Mason's imagination of Chinese women and Chinese culture, which not only satisfy his desires, but also endow him authority as a connoisseur to discover and appreciate the "Chineseness" underlying the seemingly westernized Hong Kong society. Meanwhile, Cold War ideology also comes into play with this nostalgic desire towards a "mythical" China, leading to an uncommon ending of this story. Therefore, I argue that the haunting presence of China saves this fiction from an easy reading of the "East" by calling question into Chineseness in Hong Kong during the 1950s.

Although Mason's reading complicates our understanding of Chineseness in Hong Kong, his imagination and desire toward China and Hong Kong are to a great extent, results of specific historical contexts. The happy ending of this novel also fails to address the intricacy of hybridity in Hong Kong. Chapter Two starts from this unsettled question and probes into the dilemma for Eurasians in Hong Kong during the 1950s. Han Suyin's autobiographical novel *A Many-Splendoured Thing* (1952), records her inner turmoil while living in Hong Kong. Han Suyin's detailed records of an everyday Hong Kong challenges an over-simplistic perception of Hong Kong as a port where "East" meets "West." The city of Hong Kong, as Han Suyin calls it, lives in a "borrowed time" and its

attachment and detachment to both Britain and China fail to transcend economic, ideological and racial differences. Nevertheless, Hong Kong's limbo between Britain and China makes it possible for Han Suyin to reinterpret her Chinese identity and embrace her dual worlds, which are only possible in Hong Kong.

Chapter Three shifts from writings in English and looks at the depiction of Hong Kong in "local" authors during the 1950s Hong Kong. This chapter concentrates on Lü Lun's 1952 fiction *Poverty-Stricken Alley* (穷巷 *Qiongxian*). In this novel, Lü Lun focuses on the miserable lives of refugees in postwar Hong Kong. Interestingly enough, Lü Lun, who was born and grew up in Hong Kong viewed Chineseness very differently from contemporary Hongkongers. Instead of repelling Chineseness, Lü Lun indicates that the hope for Hong Kong refugees lies in the fact that the poor class should be united to fight against the rich class. His interpretation of the refugee problem in postwar Hong Kong might make one think about the communist ideology that all proletariats should be united. Nevertheless, I argue that Lü Lun's emphasis on optimism and the possibility of a better future is an early version of the Hong Kong Dream. Returning to this novel, thus will allow us to delineate the historical development of locality in Hong Kong.

The last chapter analyzes Liu Yichang's *The Drunkard*, which offers a different interpretation of Chineseness as Lü Lun. From a literary perspective, Liu Yichang wants to preserve and develop the Chinese literary tradition in Hong Kong. In the novel, the protagonist Jiutu, a professional writer, takes it his responsibility to revitalize Chinese

literature in Hong Kong. Unlike Lü Lun, who believes there is a future for the poor people in Hong Kong, Jiutu in *The Drunkard* is trapped between his self-perception as a Chinese writer and the harsh reality that serious literature is belittled in capitalist Hong Kong. Liu Yichang does not find a way for Jiutu to get out of his dilemma and Jiutu's surrender to the materialized literary market reveals Liu Yichang's concern about the literary future for Hong Kong and the possible ending of the Chinese literary traditions in Hong Kong. Jiutu's interpretation of Chinese literary tradition does not have any followers in Hong Kong, but he is reluctant to renegotiate his role as a writer in Hong Kong. Liu Yichang's anxiety and sense of powerlessness in the 1960s disappear in his 1972 novella *Tête-Bêche* (*Duidao* 對倒). When Liu Yichang looks back at the booming popular culture in 1970s Hong Kong, this novella displays an appreciation of the materializing process in Hong Kong, which generates a new sprouting locality that has started transforming since the previous few decades. All his anxieties displayed in writings during the 1950s and 1960s, finally converge to an understanding of Hong Kong locality, which will continue to be challenged and transformed.



## CHAPTER 1

### COLONIAL NOSTALGIA: SUZIE WONG IN 1950'S HONG KONG

“1957 in Hong Kong, a year when nothing eventful took place.”<sup>18</sup> Hong Kong author and scholar Leung Ping-kwan starts and ends his article “Hong Kong, 1957”<sup>19</sup> with the above sentence. It is not clear whether the title of Leung’s article was meant to pay a tribute to Wu Xie’s 1957 poem “Spring 1957: Hong Kong,”<sup>20</sup> but it is manifest that Leung’s article echoes Wu Xie’s uneasiness by looking back to the cultural imagination that took place in 1950’s Hong Kong. Wu Xie’s anxiety about the rootless Hong Kong is explicit in various aspects. He is concerned about the corrupting worship of money which makes “the cheap dream of horse racing tickets become the single hope of life;” and “Belief was lost and only money guaranteed survival” (32). Western culture was so overwhelmingly popular that there were youths singing “Only You” and dancing with

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<sup>18</sup> Some of the secondary sources in this chapter are in Chinese, although they have both a Chinese and an English title. See bibliography for details. For those that are originally written in Chinese, translations are mine.

<sup>19</sup> This article is included in a special issue in the *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* in 2009 that focuses on literary and cultural imagination during the 1950s in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China (185, 195).

<sup>20</sup> This poem 一九五七年：香港 consists ten sonnets that reflect Wu Xie’s 無邪 concerns about the cultural and literary future for the colony during the 1950s. It was first published in *Wenyi Xinchao* 文藝新潮 on October 20th, 1957, p.32-34.

permed hair on street. It was as if the “Imported spirits could trample the whole world” (34). What was more serious, accompanying materialism and westernization in Hong Kong was the loss of attachment to traditional Chinese cultures and self-satisfaction with the status quo. In the last sonnet Wu Xie writes:

Even if the Peak collapsed  
It would be impossible to escape the shroud-like Chinese shadow,  
As if the honor of history was merely the memory the last generation.  
Even Chinese characters were forgotten like antiquity;  
Nor was there any surname,  
But only obsequiousness which shined everywhere. (34)

In this poem, as Leung acutely points out, Wu Xie “attempts to investigate the gloominess among the masses in the colony” (191). Acknowledging the validity of Wu Xie’s anxiety about Hong Kong under specific socio-historical contexts, Leung points out that from a diachronic point of view, “the popular culture did not mean complete westernization and returning to Chinese nationalism would not necessarily be a solution” (192).

Leung looks at the 1950s in retrospect and argues that although various cultural vignettes emerged in 1957 Hong Kong, nothing remarkable took place. He uses “uneventful” (没有大事) to describe the year 1957, but he is not denying the literary significance of that specific year. Instead, Leung is saying that it is indeed these

seemingly mundane and unrelated moments that together piece up the cultural puzzle that bothers Wu Xie. 1957 witnessed the return of Liu Yichang 劉以鬯 from Singapore, who is regarded as one of the earliest Chinese writers to adopt modernist technique (see Larson 90). Also in 1957, Liang Yusheng 梁羽生 initiated in *Ta Kong Pao* 大公報 serialization of martial arts fiction, “a genre that had disappeared from mainland China” (Leung 188). While martial arts fiction was first regarded as vulgar<sup>21</sup>, it has now become one of the most important components in modern Hong Kong literary history, and authors such as Liang Yusheng and Jin Yong enjoy great popularity in Chinese communities around the world. In terms of the impact of western popular culture, Leung cites Tang Disheng 唐滌生 as a perfect model who successfully adopted western films into Cantonese Opera. It is possible for Tang to combine these two disparate art forms because of “the unique Hong Kong cultural space” (190) and since then Tang gradually diverged from his counterparts who remained in Guangzhou, such as Hung Sin-nui 紅線女. Taking into account of all these cultural moments that took place in 1957, Leung concludes that the 1950s in Hong Kong is overall a highly hybrid period, with traditional Chinese art forms prospering and co-existing with Western popular culture, which “later even stimulated the transformation of literature as a whole in Hong Kong” (191).

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<sup>21</sup> The debate on serious literature and popular literature is best presented in Liu Yichang’s novel *The Drunkard*, which is my focus in Chapter Four. In this 1962 novel, Liu criticizes the overwhelming “Forty-cent Fiction” 四毫子小說, which includes popular martial arts fiction, adventure novels, sentimental novels and pornographic novels.

It is interesting to note that Leung and Wu Xie display exactly opposite reading of Hong Kong culture in the 1950s. While the latter was more concerned of the disappearance of Chinese traditions in Hong Kong, the former actually read this change more as a reinvention of the traditions, something that can be identified as uniquely Hongkongese. Their different approaches are not hard to understand because Leung's analysis is synchronic yet Wu Xie's is diachronic. Wu Xie's concern about the future for Hong Kong culture during the 1950s has his rationale, but the names that Leung mentioned in the article turned out to be cultural and literary celebrities in Hong Kong. Regardless of their diverging judgment of the cultural phenomena in the 1950s, both Leung and Wu Xie notice that it is a period of rapid changes. This sense of transience actually does not only take place in the 1950s, but is also a characteristic of the 1980's Hong Kong, as Abbas concludes. Hong Kong is literally and metaphorically a city of "transients" where "the sense of temporary is very strong" in addition to the flow of immigrants (Abbas 4). While Leung and Abbas are quite comfortable with this sense of transience, which they consider as crucial to the "disappearing" Hong Kong, Wu Xie's uneasiness with this transience reveals a different reading of the relationship between Hong Kong and Chinese traditions. Wu Xie is afraid that Hong Kong will no longer be a Chinese city once the Chinese cultural heritage is lost.

Indeed Wu Xie is not the only one who worried about the loss of Chinese traditions in Hong Kong during the 1950s. I agree with Leung that going back to the so-called

Chinese roots is not the only solution. It seems that those authors and artists, who successfully integrated western and Chinese cultures, have been well recognized. Leung applauds their effort to create a unique Hong Kong cultural space, which is not confined by its Chinese and Western influences. On the other hand, writers such as Wu Xie, who aspires for “authentic” and “pure” Chineseness gradually disappeared from Hong Kong literary studies. Does that mean other artists and their works remained neglected because they fail to fit into the current cultural space in Hong Kong? Is it because they fail to create something unique about Hong Kong by concentrating too much on commemorating the past—as Wu Xie advocates, or on complete westernization? Indeed can we call these two approaches failure? What can we learn from the neglected texts and their nostalgia for Chineseness and Westernization in 1950’s Hong Kong?

In this chapter, I aim to read the cultural imagination by someone who is not often considered as a Hong Kong writer, but who shares the same concerns as Wu Xie. Richard Mason’s *The World of Suzie Wong*, which was published in 1957, is not mentioned in Leung’s article. Of course, Leung had his rationale, because for one thing, he was writing for a journal which deals with modern literature in Chinese; and for another Mason’s novel does not seem to fit into the literary and cultural collage of 1950’s Hong Kong even though the story is set during that historical period. This novel was a best-seller about post-war Hong Kong, and it is almost indispensable in any anthropology of Hong Kong

literature in English<sup>22</sup>. Contrary to its popularity among common readers, *The World of Suzie Wong* has received very scant scholarly attention<sup>23</sup>. The language of this novel almost immediately removes it from the category of native Hong Kong writing, as I outlined in my introduction. A more important reason that accounts for its disappearance in Hong Kong literary history probably has to do with its presentation of Hong Kong, which conflicts with the commonly recognized style. More than often, this novel, together with many other British novels that focus on Hong Kong, is regarded as a colonial portrait of a stereotypical Hong Kong and the East. Interestingly enough, Abbas compares so-called “colonial writers” such as Richard Mason and James Clavell with successful and serious literary figures such as Lu Xun and Louise Ho—the same author that I mentioned above, who wishes to see more English writing about Hong Kong—to show the former’s lack of awareness of the cultural diversities in Hong Kong. More specifically, these so-called “colonial writings” fail to touch the locality of Hong Kong.

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<sup>22</sup> Excerpts of this novel are both included in *Hong Kong: Somewhere between Heaven and Earth* (1996) edited by Barbara-Sue White, and *City Voices: Hong Kong Writing in English, to the Present* (2003) edited by Xu Xi and Michael Ingham. In the foreword for *City Voices*, Louise Ho, a native Hong Kong poet who writes in English, acknowledges the insufficiencies of both writing Hong Kong in English, and corresponding anthologies. But she does wish that this book will “become a mode for future anthologies to grow from and a stimulus for the reading and writing of Hong Kong literature in English” (xiii).

<sup>23</sup> Cloke Tsui, Ho-ning in his M.A. thesis points out that only “two book reviews [about the novel] dated 1957 were found on the internet. Both critics found it regrettably absurd, topical, superficial and thin” (43). In terms of its Hollywood adaptation, most critics were disappointed with the representation of Suzie as an “Orientalist woman” imagined by Hollywood and Hong Kong “constructed as clamorous, chaotic, filthy and uncivilized in the film’s ‘orientalizing the Orient’ process” (63, 69).

To borrow Abbas's words, "they cannot take the risk of addressing the ordinary and the banal, that is, of addressing the local, which is one of the most distinctive signs of writing Hong Kong" (112). That is to say, Hong Kong in these writings, such as *The World of Suzie Wong* and James Clavell's *Tai-pan* (1966), which Abbas cites as examples that should be excluded from the category of "writing Hong Kong," functions merely as an exotic background to glamorize the heroic and romantic experiences of the Western protagonists.

Admittedly, even after WWII, when previous colonies declared independence one after another, writings about Hong Kong still bear features of colonial writing (as Abbas argues) , not to mention that Hong Kong did not officially get rid of the status of a Britain colony until 1997. Still, two questions remain unanswered before we can easily dismiss these writings by labeling them as colonialist and Orientalist. The first is, do they indeed neglect the local and banal, and what does "locality" connote after all? And secondly, is labelling some texts as "local" also a way of essentializing Hong Kong locality? In my opinion, it is impossible to give a quintessential definition of "the local" because its connotation is always evolving. It is possible, however to investigate the ever-changing social and historical specificities that impact various representations of the local. We have to understand that Hong Kong in the 1950s was often imagined as situated between the "East" and the "West." Likewise, the depiction of Hong Kong and perception of locality in texts such as *The World of Suzie Wong* reflects how Mason understands the position of

Hong Kong under specific historical contexts. In other words, authors during the 1950s did not necessarily represent Hong Kong locality the same way as Abbas and Leung recognize in the 1980s. The depictions of the 1950's Hong Kong might be totally opposite to their imagination of Hong Kong in the 1980s. These writings, which do not depict the cultural space and the local in the way that contemporary critics are looking for, nevertheless problematize the meaning of "local" and "Hong Kong." They delineate the evolution of a cultural space in Hong Kong that gradually emerges from the Chinese and Western impacts on Hong Kong, as Wu Xie and Leung are both aware of.

In this chapter, I investigate Mason's perspective as a British expatriate and his understanding of Hong Kong's position between Britain and China in the 1950s. *The World of Suzie Wong* portrays an adventurous love story between a British expatriate painter Robert Lomax and a Shanghai-born prostitute Suzie Wong in Hong Kong. Robert originally treats Suzie merely as his muse of painting but he gradually falls in love with her. They have encountered many obstacles until the end when Robert's talent is recognized by western connoisseurs. The great success of his paintings leads to the denouement of their marriage in Macau. Such a representation of the East might easily be tagged as "Orientalist" because its depiction of Suzie Wong as a "hooker with a heart of gold" is a clichéd archetype. What deserve critical study in this novel are the ways in which Mason uses these clichéd archetypes to negotiate his imagination of Hong Kong, and more specifically the ways in which Hong Kong was trapped between Chinese origin



and British coloniality during the 1950s. I argue that the apparent disappearance of “Chineseness” in Hong Kong and simultaneous westernization that took place in 1950s Hong Kong bothered not only Chinese authors such as Wu Xie but also colonial authors like Richard Mason because for them the disappearance of Chineseness in Hong Kong could not only destruct their fantasy of the “primitive” East but also challenge their authority as colonial observers. Therefore, during the 1950s, the nostalgia for Chinese authenticity becomes an indispensable stimulus for colonial writers such as Mason to identify Hong Kong. It is in Hong Kong’s remaining Chinese “authenticity” that the British reaffirms their “superiority” as sympathetic appreciators. Ideally, the ability to truly understand Hong Kong as a Chinese city also assures the continuing British governance of Hong Kong.

My arguments are based on textual analysis of this novel and historical contextualization of Hong Kong during the 1950s. I will first discuss the complementation between Robert’s nostalgia for “authentic” China and his self-affirmation. Robert, as a painter of indigenous peoples in the East, is desperate to preserve and record the remaining “Chineseness,” which he finds in the prostitutes in Nam Kok dancing hall in Wanchai, in order to understand and interpret “the [historical] moment ... filtered through [his] own vision” (Mason 13). This character, at first glance, much resembles the hero in what Mary Louise Pratt describes as “sentimental travel writings” that erupted in Europe since the eighteenth century. In these writings, the

sentimental hero observes the innocent local people from his own personal account, with much sentimentality and romanticism. According to Pratt, some crucial characteristics of the sentimental observer include: “not only Europeanness, maleness, and middle classness, of course, but also innocence and passivity” (78). Like this sentimental observer, Robert Lomax claims to understand and even appreciate the naivety and simplicity of Suzie. But unlike this sentimental observer, who seems to have no distinctive individuality, Robert’s social status is very unique among his fellow countrymen. In the eyes of local people, Robert is a white man no different from the British colonial officials or American sailors. However, his authority and power as a western man does not make him as authoritative among other expatriates. In fact, in 1950’s Hong Kong, Robert’s Europeanness, maleness, and middle-classness do not stand out in a society full of European expatriates, American sailors, and rich immigrants from mainland China. This explains the reason why his understanding of Hong Kong has to center around the world of Suzie because only in his appreciation and conquest of Suzie can he reclaim and reaffirm his own identity and agency as a European middle-class man. That is to say, the image of a “local” that Robert creates is one that is remarkably non-western so as to preserve his authority as a superior observer, savior, conqueror, and as a whole a western man who understands China. He finds this contrast in his nostalgia for the East, which is best represented in his perfect model, Suzie Wong.

Likewise, Mason’s fiction is his attempt to grasp something solid of Hong Kong in a

moment of transition so as to legitimize his transcultural interpretation of British colonization in an era of decolonization. From this perspective, the image of Suzie and the love story are mere allegories for a larger colonial record of Hong Kong under Western eyes. The second part of this chapter will deal with the historical specificity that influences the composition of this novel. Mason's romanticized and sometimes arbitrary depiction of the relationship between the western colonizers and the colonized land as well as its orientalized people reveals the mechanism of colonialism in the Cold War period. The power structure between these two parties are not necessarily antagonistic. Instead, as the novel ends, a peaceful and harmonious marriage is possible for Robert and Suzie. Does that also reveal Mason's optimistic foresight of Britain's future relationship with the island of Hong Kong? Yet this utopian ending reflects Mason's reductive dealing with intricacy of locality and its position between China and Britain, condensing Hong Kong into the small world of Suzie, who is ready and willing to be saved by her western lover. We do not have to accept Mason's filtered vision because the complexity of Hong Kong does not simply disappear from the world of Suzie Wong and their marriage is far from a happy ending.

### **Suzie Wong: Temptation of Chineseness**

Too much has been said about the colonial implication of a love story between a "native" woman and a colonial expatriate. What is interesting in *The World of Suzie Wong*

is the connotation of “native.” Why is Robert fascinated with Suzie instead of Gwenny, Lulu, Alice, or any other girls that he encounters in Nam Kok? Why does he find Wanchai charming and inspiring, instead of Kowloon, the Peak, New Territories, or Lantau Island? Why does the story have to take place in Hong Kong, rather than Malay, Burma, or Singapore, the other “Eastern” countries, where Robert can also depict “native” women? In my opinion, Suzie is an ideal representative that meets Robert’s fascination about Chineseness, the mysterious and exotic “other” which has existed in European imagination for long<sup>24</sup>. Although the story has to be set in Hong Kong due to practical reasons<sup>25</sup>, the characteristics that Suzie displays well represent Chinese, Hong Kong and even the Orient.

Robert’s fascination with Oriental women does not start with Suzie. Long before he comes to paint in Hong Kong, Robert works in a Malayan plantation. He has been satisfied with his abstinent life until he recalls his glimpse of a Burmese woman washing clothes while a Dakota aircraft flying over her. Thereafter, Robert falls in love with

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<sup>24</sup> Marco Polo is among the most famous ones who introduce the Eastern marvels to Europe. The earliest fictional depiction of Hong Kong is found in the book *Yellow and White*, which I discuss later in this chapter.

<sup>25</sup> As Thomas Y. T. Luk points out, “Hong Kong as city in the 1950’s and its accessibility to western audiences and readers in physical, geographical and literary terms, remains still the far and distant mysterious orient” (75). Chi-kwan Mark’s *Hong Kong and the Cold War* also mentions that after 1945, and especially after the communist revolution in 1949, Hong Kong has three different roles, namely “a British colony, a Chinese community, and, in a sense, a world city” (14). For more details on the contrast of accessibility between Hong Kong and mainland China in the 1950s, see Mark p.19-26.

painting with the aim to become a shrewd observer “interpreting the moment in the light of his own mind—his own personality and knowledge” (Mason 13). Robert’s ambition to become an interpreter of life, native people (especially women) and war propels him to travel in Southeast Asia, which irritates his expatriate girlfriend. He chooses to continue his career as a painter because these local girls have “an innocence that [his girlfriend] has lost” (17). The comparison between his expatriate girlfriend and local Malay girls initiates Robert’s pursuit after innocence, which he believes to be found only in non-Western environment. That is why he decides to leave Singapore for Hong Kong because “Hong Kong’s really China” and he “won’t see a European” (19). It is also for the same reason that Robert decides to live in Wanchai, where “no Europeans live... [but] only Chinese” (21). These reasons, which are told in retrospect, account for Robert’s arrival in Hong Kong where he wishes to find innocent Oriental feminine beauty.

In most cases, native women in colonial writings are, in Said’s words “the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing” (207). The beauty of Suzie likewise centers on her female body and purports Chinese feminine virtues, which trigger both sensual and spiritual desire of Robert and many others. Her allegedly typical Chinese face and her traditional costumes, together with her willingness to sacrifice all meet Robert’s expectation for a “real” Chinese woman. Detailed depictions of Suzie’s face appear repeatedly throughout the novel. On their first encounter, Robert notices an extremely beautiful Chinese face

among the crowd: “her face was round and smooth, her eyes long black ellipses, and her eyebrows so perfectly arched that they look drawn—but in fact they had only been helped out with pencil at their tips. Her cheekbones were broad, with hints of Mongolia” (6).

This “typical” Chinese face catches Robert’s interest at once and he has the impulse to paint her almost immediately. No wonder “this indestructible Chinese complexion ... that lovely smooth skin” (50) becomes the most frequent compliment that Robert repeats over and over again. Another element that helps highlight this beautiful Chinese body is the traditional costume. Suzie, except her first appearance in the novel, is in a traditional cheongsam throughout the book. There is a scene when the fortune teller tells Suzie that she is going to England in two years, and Suzie asks Robert’s advice for the correct clothes to wear in London, Robert without doubt chooses the Chinese dress and believes that she would “be a sensation in London” (128). In Robert’s mind, this traditional type of clothes, as another layer of her “indestructible Chinese complexion” (50) signifies the authenticity of Suzie’s identity as a Chinese woman. The cheongsam worn by Suzie not only highlights her Oriental feminine beauty, but also makes her “a symbol of objectified female sexuality” (Tsui 52).

There is nothing novel in Mason’s obsession with the traditional costumes that local women wear. Emphasis on traditional Chinese costume worn by local women abounds in writings during that time. In *Tai-pan* for instance, similar dialogues about the Chinese costumes take place between the protagonist Dirk Struan and his Chinese mistress May-

may. When Struan is taking May-may to a ball whose major participants are British, May-may picks a western style dress. This choice in Struan's eyes, instantly shatters her beauty because "her swaying gait [was] made ugly by the dress. Struan knew that nothing would ever be quite the same again between them. She had made a horrible mistake" (155). The biggest mistake that May-may has made is to abandon her Oriental tag, which makes her invisible to the colonizer's eyes on spot. Robert and Dirk's preference of the Chinese costume over Western clothes once again testifies what Ford and Chanda argue as a clichéd trope in colonial writings that "Chinese women wearing Western clothes signals a cultural transgression that Western men seem unable or unwilling to tolerate" (118). Both novels certainly inherit the tradition from one of the earliest collections that write about Hong Kong and other Asian countries *Yellow and White* (1895), where W. Calton Dawe almost always depicts local women in their traditional costumes and postures, such as Chinese women in their gowns, Japanese women in kimonos and Thai and Malayan women captivating the Western male expatriate while carrying pots on their heads<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> The collection contains eight short stories which describe the earlier colonist writing and their view of Asia. Among the eight, six involves the love affair between a local woman and the Western expatriate. The languages and plots in these stories are more or less the same, and first gaze upon the local women, without exception, falls upon their traditional look. The six stories in this collected are entitled as "Yellow and White," "Oshima," "Sada," "Amok," "The City of the White Elephant," and "Kitsune." These names alone highlight the exoticism that the author wants to play with the East, and indeed his depiction of the Eastern femininity fulfils his purpose as well.

While Dawe and other earlier writers<sup>27</sup> do not seem to appreciate the East except for its physical exoticism, Mason adds another layer of appreciation of the Eastern femininity. Besides exterior appearance, Suzie's Chinese femininity is also reflected in her feminine virtues, i.e., her fulfillment of her gender roles as a caring lover and mother. Although Suzie's initial motivation to work in the brothel is to make money without suffering drudgery of hard work, this materialistic intention is romanticized. Robert reminds us that it is her uncle who rapes her and forces her to earn a living in Hong Kong, and her continuation of this dirty job is her attempt to raise her bastard son. It seems that Suzie's miseries all result from her sacrifice for her family. Suzie has emphasized more than once that she chooses to continue as a prostitute in order to raise her baby. Her ideal femininity is thus reinforced in her motherhood. She tells Robert: "Except for my baby, I'd kill myself;" (59) but she needs to earn enough money "for her child's education, to keep him from growing up like herself. She even had dreams of saving enough money eventually to send him to the University of Hong Kong" (161). Her flirtation with her Euroamerican customers thus is only a job, which is irrelevant to love or morality. Many other dance girls endure this humiliating job for similar reasons.

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<sup>27</sup> See *Hong Kong: Somewhere between Heaven and Earth*, a collection compiled by Barbara-Sue White, which contains vignettes about Hong Kong since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Colonist perspective is very prevalent in early writing. Despise on Hong Kong the barren land and Chinese people as an uncivilized race could be seen in writings such as family letters between expatriates and their noble families in Britain, or official reports from chancellors to the Queen.



Gweny—Suzie’s best friend, for example, becomes a prostitute to support her family and protect her sister from falling into the same path; old Lily Lou sacrifices herself to make sure her two sons could survive. From this perspective, prostitution for many women in Hong Kong is not humiliating and inferior, but rather humanistic and indeed feminine.

This trope abounds in colonial writing. In *Tai-pan*, the heroine also sacrifices herself for the sake of her family. May-may considers that family is “the only real thing of value that five thousand years of civilization and experimenting had taught, [which] was safe and worthwhile” (155). May-may is actually a gift to Struan from her grandfather Jin-qua with a special mission to help strengthen the economic bondage between her family and the upcoming colonizers on the island. The price of becoming the concubine of a “white ghost” is to have her name removed from the ancestral scrolls forever. It is worthwhile because it is a sacrifice for the family, although ironically, May-may belongs no longer to the family that she sacrifices for. The contradictory effects of Chinese women’s sacrifice are glorified and arouse compassion for May-may after the omniscient narrator reveals this secret to the readers, a secret which Struan has never known. Despite of his incomplete knowledge of May-may’s family, Struan loves her even after malaria deprives her of former exquisite beauty, because he thinks it is “what is underneath, in the eyes and in the heart” that makes one beautiful (632).

What then is the deep-seated reason that western men find Oriental femininity so

attractive? Gina Marchetti argues that in many films, colonial representations of the ideal Eastern lovers “deliver a conservative adherence to the racial and gender status quo” (109). In other words, the admiration for Oriental femininity is an attempt to maintain patriarchy that has been under challenge in modern feminist movements. Only in the Orient can western men continue to enjoy the submissiveness, innocence, and self-sacrifice of women, qualities that are disappearing in the West. In many films that are set in the same period in Hong Kong, western women are often demonized because “[the] Caucasian woman remains independent and potentially dangerous”<sup>28</sup> (115). Mason’s depiction of western women in this novel is no exception; they are all portrayed as superficial, stupid and indifferent. Robert’s Caucasian girlfriend in Malay has lost the innocent beauty, but has to rely on “comb and cosmetics” (17). And Robert further points out that the western women do not even realize their problems because of their ignorance of the delicacy of Oriental femininity. Gwenny’s American patron writes her a letter, complaining the stupidity of his American girlfriend, who thinks “Chinese girls still wear grass skirts or something” (28). The most defamed figure in this novel is the wife of Ben Jeffcoat, Suzie’s one-time patron. The reason that Ben goes to Suzie, as he tells Robert, is

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<sup>28</sup> Marchetti’s book contains ten films that are set in Asia and examines how different types of romantic love between the white knights and oriental women dominated the screen during the 1950s and 1960s. She also provides a very good analysis of some typical images for Caucasian women and most of them, according to her research, are almost all negative because these writers—all white middle-class male authors, shared a different opinion with the feminist activists at that time and were worried about the lost femininity, which now could only be found in the Orient.

that Elizabeth is boring, dominant and overwhelming. Her indifference to sex even makes Ben impotent. It is due to Suzie's compliments that "he had overcome his impotence" (94). Ben realizes that "oriental women had a femininity that Western women had lost—that they were dedicated to building up masculinity, whereas Western women were dedicated to its destruction" (84-85). But after Ben regains his physical and spiritual dignity as a Western man, he abandons Suzie and goes back to his wife because he finds the Chinese culture is "barbaric" and Suzie is so stupid that she has not even heard of Winston Churchill (133). Therefore, his appreciation of the so-called oriental femininity only reveals his hypocrisy, which also makes Robert's adoration of Suzie suspicious. Is his sympathy for Suzie also hypocritical, which only functions to assure his own subjectivity?

### **Robert Lomax: Savior or the Saved**

In many Hollywood films that deal with a love story between a western expatriate and a local women, "the romantic hero functions as a white knight who rescues the nonwhite heroine from the excesses of her own culture while 'finding' himself through this exotic sexual liaison" (Marchetti 109). In a similar way, Suzie's innocence such as intellectual ignorance, willingness to sacrifice, and submissiveness, turns her into a stereotypical oriental low-class woman who needs to be saved by a white knight.

Needless to say, in Mason's depiction, Robert is such an ideal lover and savior. But

Robert is also different from the stereotypical white knight because he does not find the excessive oriental culture irritating. Instead he is depicted as someone who is eager to interpret the Orient from a sympathetic perspective. But what generates his sympathy? Robert claims that he, compared to other snobbish Englishmen and American sailors, has a better understanding of the Chinese culture, and therefore has the ability to appreciate its innocence as well as complexity. In addition, with a humanism that is missing in his fellow countryman, Robert is able to view the Chinese, even the prostitutes in Nam Kok as equal cultural beings.

Mason is aware that Chinese culture is more than one-dimensional. Regardless of all the clichéd depictions associated with Suzie, we also see other sides of China in 1950s Hong Kong in this novel. While Suzie, Gwenny and many others are willing to sacrifice for their families, there are also prostitutes such as Little Alice, who is “shallow, irresponsible, and mean” (38). She simply lets her child die from neglect. While Robert appreciates Suzie’s innocence and naivety, he also enjoys the sophistication that is shown in Lily Lou, an old prostitute from Shanghai. Prostitution back then was more like an art and she remembered her own training in a smart brothel in Shanghai: “oh in those days you’d got to know how to please a man, you’d got to take trouble and time” (39). Even though Lily Lou has grown old, she maintains a tempting “enigmatic smile” (39). According to Robert, the sophistication of Chinese culture endows illiterate Suzie with a special charm. The first time Suzie Wong appears in the novel, her outfit—“a pony tail”

and “green keen-length denim jeans” and her manners make Robert believe that she is the daughter of some rich Taipans. When later he finds out that Suzie cannot read or write, he is not astonished although “her manners, her mentality, her very appearance and style, had suggested something more than a humble upbringing,” because “heritage of a great civilization was shared in some measure by all Chinese alike” (62).

His recognition of the sophisticated Chinese culture enables him to see something that Ben and other western men are unable to see. Ben abandons Suzie because he cannot tolerate her “ancestor-worship nonsense” and illiteracy and ignorance. He complains to Robert that Suzie is so stupid that she does not even know who Winston Churchill is (Mason 133). But Robert, who knows that Chinese pronunciation of English names “depended on whatever written characters were chosen to represent them” at once understands Suzie’s piginized pronunciation of “Winston Churchill” which sounds like “One-shoe Chee-chee” (145). Robert finds her Pidgin English very amusing and regrets for Ben’s arrogance. Because he is so understanding and considerate, Robert is “practically Jesus Christ to all the girls down in the bar” (114).

Like Jesus Christ, Robert seems to treat everyone in Nam Kok as equal human beings and his own explanation is humanism. There is one time though when Robert’s fascination about the Orient collapses. This scenario takes place after Robert and Suzie confess love to each other, but she decides to continue her career because she needs money for her baby. This decision greatly humiliates Robert, who develops hatred

towards all the Chinese prostitutes. He believes that their so-called sacrifice is “essentially degrading” and their “good manners were only a deceptive oriental facade” and he made a mistake “confusing innocence with ignorance” (166-167). He begins to “long for the European company” and “their very dullness [holds] nostalgia” for him (168). Two days later he joins a party on the Peak, and his conscience returns when he listens to the derogatory comments on Chinese people from his fellow expatriates. There he feels: “lack of charity for fellow human beings seemed to me an incomparably worse sin than any to be found at the Nam Kok” (169). He decides to go back to Suzie and his achievement in painting finally saves her from continuing her prostitution.

Indeed Robert displays a very good understanding of Hong Kong and what he believes to be authentic Chinese culture, but humanism is definitely not the deep-rooted cause for his adoration of this culture. Pratt argues that in early European travel writing, “humanism, egalitarianism, and critical relativism anchored securely in a sense of European authenticity, power, and legitimacy” (84). But in Robert’s case, he is using humanism to challenge the European authenticity, power, and legitimacy that he sees in other British expatriates, so as to assert his own power and authority as someone who truly understands Chinese culture. In other words, his obsession with Suzie Wong to a great extent is not to display superiority to the native women, but rather to arouse recognition in his fellow Europeans. Therefore, his so-called nostalgia for the East serves as a means to finding his own agency as a western expatriate.

Now let's go back to the original question: why does Robert decide to paint Suzie's in the first place? I think his decision is a result of his economic, sexual, and social desires. Robert explains at the beginning of the novel that he has "a nostalgic whiff" for the East because he "had no training for a career; no feeling of roots, of belonging" in England (13). His parents died early, leaving him nothing. In order to gain respect from his uncle, he starts apprenticeship in a factory, which stops halfway without any reason. Although he claims that Nam Kok is the "point of contact" (26) where he can know real Chinese people, economic insufficiency plays a greater role for his decision<sup>29</sup>. He arrives in Hong Kong as an unknown artist, who can only afford to live at Sunset Lodge, "the lowest contour of the Peak" because he cannot find "anywhere cheaper" (21). Also in this lodge, where all the tenants are European, he sees no possibility to change his social situations. But when he settles down in Nam Kok, he enjoys a self-esteem because his Europeanness makes all the girls believe that he is a generous man with "good class" (49). He later confesses to Suzie that he is not "really a big man at all;" he is so poor that he cannot afford a girl in the brothel (55). In such a situation, his initial economic

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<sup>29</sup> I certainly agree that living in Nam Kok provides Robert a vision that cannot be obtained elsewhere. But his settlement in this dancing hall/brothel also reflects his low social status. For British expatriates who really enjoy supremacy, their residence is more likely to be on the Peak. See for instance, an autobiography by the daughter of the colonial governor Francis Henry May, Phoebe Whitworth, *View from the Peak. An Autobiography by Phoebe Whitworth*. This memoir represents the view of someone who enjoyed the full privilege of her colonial position. She also has her Chinese acquaintances, but the Chinese people she contacts will never be someone like Suzie.

superiority, which in fact he does not possess, starts to fade. Suzie would try to pay for his bills, and at the same time continue to sell her body to maintain economic income (62). Since he cannot afford a girl economically, he has to captivate them in other ways, and painting is his best tool.

Robert's career of painting starts with his oppressed sexual desire. While working on the Malayan plantation, where miscegenation is forbidden by his boss, Robert starts "pouring into [his] sketchbook all the energy that, but for George Wheeler's prohibition, [he] would have spent in making love" (14). By depicting beautiful women, he more or less alleviates his sexual starvation. Indeed, sexuality is the roots for his creativity because through his paintings, he displays his "appreciation" of the native women and wins their love. The girls are willing to let Robert paint them because they feel Robert treats them as human beings instead of sexual bodies, ready to be painted. His sympathy towards these girls pays off: his painting gains recognition from British connoisseurs and brings him economic success and social recognition. In other words, his expertise on the East receives approbation from the West and that is what he cares. Although he at first is very cynical about the approval from the western connoisseurs, as he fears his success would be merely "a momentary stir amongst the culture snobs of Mayfair, before they moved on to the next stir, the next discovery, the next fashion" (18), he enjoys the compliments on his paintings in London. A noble lady tells him that looking at his picture makes her feel her world has been "so narrowly lived, so shut in" (280). This success is



what Robert wants to achieve. He finally finds a group of audience who can share his understanding of the East, which secures his role as a qualified observer, together with economic success, sexual satisfaction, and social recognition.

From what I analyzed above, it is probably not difficult to understand why it is Suzie's world that becomes the subject of his painting. Prostitutes in the 1950s were a marginalized group in both China and Britain. Their gratitude for a Western sympathetic patron is understandable. In *Nam Kok*, Robert enjoys being worshipped as a savior. Meanwhile, living among the girls offers him familiarity and authority to interpret their Chineseness, which in turn guarantees his successful career as a "China expert." In this sense, by claiming his appreciation of Chineseness in his ideal models—namely, the girls in *Nam Kok*, Robert finally gets what he desires: economic success, sexual fascination, and social recognition. More importantly, he is saved from his ignoble past.

### **The Secret of Miscegenation: A Cold-War Project**

Robert's paintings become a great success in London and he secures his authority as an interpreter of the East. Beyond personal achievements, there is something larger to his project. As he claims, his initial painting of a Burmese woman informs him the meaning of the moment in the war. What moment does his painting of Suzie reveal? The scene of their first love making might offer us some glimpses into his large project. The sight of Suzie's naked body reminds Robert of a miracle that he read from the Bible:

In the foreground was the shoulder and lifted hand of Jesus, and beyond him a white wall with a barred window, with two ragged lepers squatting at its foot, their bodies disfigured and eaten away by disease, and in front of them a third beggar who a moment ago had been like them, but who now stood straight and whole—illuminated by this same lived, unearthly light in which Suzie stood under the street lamp. (147)

He feels that their sexual intercourse will momentarily cleanse her of her uncle's contamination and the stigma she bears as a prostitute, restoring the virginity that she has long lost, just like how Jesus cures the leper.

Mason puts much emphasis on this scene because it literally signifies the completion of interracial sexuality and foreshadows the forthcoming legal marriage between Robert and Suzie in Macao. Mason spends about one tenth of the book depicting the procedures of their marriage. Still such a detailed and even exaggerated depiction of Robert's sensations and the incongruous comparability between their sexual activity and the religious salvation of Jesus is very odd in colonial writing because miscegenation has been a taboo, especially in Hong Kong. In an article that examines the works of James Dalziel, who is among the first to write about Hong Kong in the early twentieth century, Ross G. Forman argues that hybridity does not function as a productive power in Hong Kong because of the existence of an equally powerful Chinese empire. Therefore, "hybridity entailed double ostracism; those engaged in miscegenation in Hong Kong or

those who were its product were despised by East and West alike, because they signified the rejection of two powerful paradigms of purity” (559). Forman certainly has his points about the power of Chinese culture in Hong Kong, and plots in *Tai-pan*, which is set in a historical background, more or less confirm his argument. As I mentioned earlier, May-may has concerns about miscegenation because once she becomes the mistress of a white man, she loses her membership in her father’s family. Likewise, Suzie faces a possible ostracism from her Chinese family because Chinese women, after having sex with Euro-Americans, are reduced to “shameless people who forsake their origins... for something more ‘universally’ desirable and profitable—association with the white world” (Chow, *Ethics* 64). If having sex with Robert means a loss of her Chineseness, how could Mason justify Robert’s obsession with Suzie’s Chineseness? Mason blames China for forsaking Suzie, because her sexuality was long ago abused by her uncle—her communal members. It is not she who forsakes her origin; her Chineseness only turns her into a victim in her Chinese family. It is Robert who really appreciates her as a Chinese and a woman. Thus, her intercourse with Robert not only restores her virginity, but also cuts her off from her Shanghai memory for good. According to Suzie, she was raped by her uncle because of the communist regime closed down the brothels. The result was that her uncle did not know where to find women and got desperate (Mason 67). Admittedly, rape was not rare in pre-modern patriarchal families<sup>30</sup>, but the accusation of the “Red China” contains

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<sup>30</sup> Cloke Tsui in the second chapter of his thesis mentions a similar system to the family

strong political implication. As Robert imagines, “if Suzie was in Red China she would be tightening bolts on tractor wheels instead of selling her body to slickers in Waikiki ties and silk shirts” (265). In other words, Suzie was sure to lose her feminine charm that Robert enjoys had she remained in mainland China. Therefore, her femininity, although inherited from the sophisticated great civilization, is under threat of the Red China which now denounces it, and can only be restored by her western lover.

So is Mason supporting hybridity by arguing that miscegenation does not necessarily lead to the mixing of races and cultures, the threat of impurity, and the danger of bastardization? To some extent, yes. As Chow argues, miscegenation can work as a “force of biological procreation and of social connotation—that gives rise to alternative groups of people whose origins are all bastardized and whose communal bond can henceforth not be based on the purity of their status” (Chow, *Ethics* 69). Her arguments are also applicable to analyze Mason’s perspective on miscegenation. However, we should be aware not to over-read Mason’s support for hybridity because his tolerance of bastardized groups is very limited and conditional. The fear of racial mixing haunts the novel and Suzie’s bastard son as a barrier has to disappear to give way to an equally threatening miscegenation. We get to see the baby twice in the novel through the eyes of Robert. The first time Robert describes him as “a half-caste and had nothing to look

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where Suzie grows up, the *mui tsai* (young female servants) system. Most of these servants are the family members of the patriarch. Nevertheless, sexual abuse was fairly common despite of incest taboo.

forward to except a lifetime of not-belonging” (Mason 60). The second time Robert mentions his experience with the baby, he admits that it always hurts to “see that swallow pathetic little Eurasian face” (153). This baby is doomed from the very beginning because of his mixed blood, because of his chauvinistic British father who shows no tolerance to his existence. The baby is killed by a collapsing house during a heavy rain and his death liberates his mother from maternal duties. His death in a natural disaster also highlights his marginality in the society as well as a fear towards racial mixing<sup>31</sup>.

The death of the baby is a turning point in this novel because it helps solve the crises between Suzie and Robert. After his death, Suzie does not need to continue her trade since there is no point in making money. Meanwhile, Robert replaces the baby and becomes Suzie’s primary concern: “Since her baby had been killed, Suzie’s pride had centered round her relationship with [Robert]. It was the only tangible asset she had left” (215). But this plot is also highly problematic because it conflicts with many of the glorious claims that Robert has made throughout the novel. He claims to appreciate Suzie’s sacrifice for her baby but in fact he cannot tolerate her profession. Therefore, the baby has to die to save her from further degradation and right after the death of the baby,

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<sup>31</sup> A lot of colonial love stories end in tragedy, and many in natural disasters, such as flood, typhoon, and mudslide. The Korean War kills Suyin’s lover, who was dispatched as a war correspondent. In the end of *A Many-Splendored Thing*, Suyin leaves Hong Kong for America with her adopted daughter. In *Tai-pan*, a more dramatic ending takes place. After Struan promises to marry May-may, a typhoon hits their house and buries both of them.

Robert's paintings succeed in London. Therefore, Suzie lingering agency as an economically independent woman, disappears. Her subjectivity now only lives in Robert's paintings. Once her lover loses faith in her, there is risk for her to simply disappear from his painting and even the world. Later in the story, there are multiple occasions where Robert, using his superior Western perceptions, criticizes her "idiotic pride" and questions her morality since one cannot "keep a good whore down" (220, 265). Robert later clarifies that these are mere "misunderstandings" but one cannot help wondering the sincerity of his so-called adoration and appreciation of Suzie's innocence at the very beginning. The death of the baby also reveals Mason's reluctance to view miscegenation as a positive force, which forms distinctive contrast to his enthusiastic depiction the first love making between Robert and Suzie. How should we interpret all these inconsistencies?

There must be other stimuli for Mason to write about Suzie Wong in addition to the self-affirmation that he wants to achieve. In my opinion, this love story which ends with miscegenation also discloses Mason's colonial imagination about the British Empire. We may get some clues from the scene that I have analyzed above, where Robert uses a humanistic view to compare the British expatriates and Chinese prostitutes. He joined a conversation that contained all types of contemptuous gossips about a well-educated Eurasian barrister, who dared "to think [Eurasians] are as good as" British (169). These comments bother Robert because it indicates all the possible pressures he has to face once

he ends up with a local woman. A well-respected “old China-hand” named O’Neill offers Robert some advice:

“You don’t want to take those people [the snobbish British] too seriously. They don’t mean so much nowadays. That mentality’s as doomed as the Empire which bred it—and which they have somehow got the impression bred the Empire, though of course it did nothing of the kind. In fact it has done a great deal, with its inflexibility, to hasten the losing of it... I am afraid that most of our fellow guests tonight were second-raters. And the real Empire builders, in their own way, were first-raters.” (171)

This figure, who knows China well, and more importantly who knows the mechanism of Empire building, is giving endorsement to Robert’s choice. Through this conversation, Mason makes a grand claim to save the Empire by displaying the mentality of first-raters. Maybe Robert’s painting and Mason’s novel both display this mentality. Then how does Mason’s/Robert’s open-mindedness, their appreciation of “barbaric” Chinese culture and marrying Chinese prostitutes, contribute to the project of empire building? To answer this question, it is necessary for us to go back to the Cold War period.

The 1950s, according to Chi-kwan Mark’s study, is a very important period in the history of Hong Kong which drew attention from the top powers of the world. He argues, “in 1957 the British position in Hong Kong appeared to be uncertain, an uncertainty which worried even top decision-makers in Washington” (Mark, *Hong Kong* 1). The

reason for the ambiguous role of Hong Kong was due to the fact that China, Britain, and the United States held different positions. Mark defines Hong Kong as “a ‘reluctant Cold Warrior’, since London wanted to demonstrate Britain’s value as a close ally of America by involving the Colony in the containment of China. But given its vulnerability in the shadow of China, Hong Kong’s role had to be as indirect, discreet, and non-confrontational in nature as possible” (6). For Britain, Hong Kong’s geographical and cultural closeness to mainland China made it a vulnerable to China’s external attack and internal subversion. Therefore, despite the anti-colonial movement after WWII, Britain decided to retain Hong Kong as a colony because it “was consistent with the preservation of Britain’s world power status” (Mark, *Hong Kong* 20). For the Chinese government however, “the return of Hong Kong was not a priority for Mao” because he was “preoccupied with the civil war with the Chinese Nationalists” (26). In other words, Hong Kong maintained only a loose diplomatic attachment to China, although the economic exchange during that time was booming. As far as the preservation of Chineseness in Hong Kong is concerned, China’s attitude was very ambiguous. Such uncertainties leave Hong Kong multiple possibilities, the biggest of which is to maintain a certain degree of agency from the Chinese impact/threat from the North<sup>32</sup>. In other

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<sup>32</sup> Compared to other British colonies, Hong Kong has gained more autonomy in term of its preservation of traditional Chinese culture, especially during the rule of Governor Clementi (1925-1930). He advocated for the usage of Chinese language and collaborated with local officers to govern Hong Kong. In fact, his infatuation with traditional Chinese culture even receives criticism from May Fourth scholars. The most famous criticism on



words, Britain now sees a possibility to detach Hong Kong from the mainland, although during the late 1950s, such a trend was not yet a diplomatic consensus.

Taking into account of the position of Hong Kong during the Cold War period, we might be able to interpret the marriage between Suzie and Robert as something more than a mere happy ending. Suzie, who is a victim of communist China, gets rid of her marginalized status by marrying a first-rate British expatriate. Their legal marriage in Macau signifies a great chasm in Suzie's Chinese identity and this legitimate happy ending for Robert and Suzie, which differs from a great many other tragic romances in colonial writing<sup>33</sup>, reveals Mason's colonial blueprint for Hong Kong. It should be a place that retains much of her Chineseness, while at the same time be ready for a Western salvation. This land offers Robert an inspiring muse as well as the possibility to become "somebody" while the social networks in England would only kill his "little flame that needed so desperately to be nourished" (Mason 281). Robert's successful entry in the world of Suzie Wong thus, symbolizes Mason's imagination to bridge the gap between the British colonizers and Hong Kong, an ideal Chinese city.

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him is from Lu Xun in the piece "A Brief Discussion on Hong Kong" (Lüetan xiangang 略談香港, 1927).

<sup>33</sup> In *Yellow and White* for instance, most of the romantic stories end in tragedy after the death of the local women. All six stories end with the death of the female, which shows the author's judgment of miscegenation, and the one who deserves punishment is always the colonized, leaving the colonizer intact.

## A Utopian Ending?

In the novel, Robert means to prove that he is indeed the first-rate builder of the British Empire, and all his ambitions have come true in the end. The newly-wed couple return to London in full glory and come back to Hong Kong with more admiration from the girls in Nam Kok. Compared to the success that Mason imagines for Robert, the reception of this novel does not end with an identical happy ending. Since its publication, *The World of Suzie Wong* has enjoyed great popularity but has not been considered as “first-raters” among writings of Hong Kong. Why could Robert succeed in his painting while Mason fails to receive literary recognition? I think we need to look into sharp contrast between Robert and Mason instead of repeating the clichéd criticism of the novel as being shallow, stereotypical, and that Robert’s fortune is merely Mason’s nonsensical fantasy. I agree that the biggest problem with Mason is his over-simplified reading of Hong Kong, which is represented by Suzie, and unfortunately, this simplification is exacerbated in the 1960 Hollywood adaptation. This film does not do justice to Mason, who “was very honest and consistent about how he filtered his views with self-conscious qualification.” (Luk 74). Instead, a simplified Hollywood melodrama takes over. There is a major change about the nationality of Robert Lomax from a British into an American. Moreover, Mason’s relatively nuanced understanding of Chinese culture is reduced to a one-dimensional Orientalist picture that Hollywood is familiar with. It is noted that the “Chineseness” in *The World of Suzie Wong* is usually emphasized in a negative manner”

(Tsui 47). Suzie is now literally placed under the Western camera, and Robert's psychological monologue is greatly chopped. The noteworthy change made in the film, in addition to the changed nationality of the hero, and the starring of Eurasian actress Nancy Kwan as Suzie<sup>34</sup>, is the erasure of traces of miscegenation. The film ends with the death of the baby (whose father in the film is a low-class Chinese man) and Suzie and Robert's departure by ferry. There is no mentioning of their marriage. We should not be surprised at the missing wedding scene because in America "anti-miscegenation law [was] not revoked in many states until the mid-late 20th century and social-cultural prohibitions and/or resistance continue to this day" (Ford and Chanda 124). Together with the deletion of the scene of miscegenation is the disappearance of Mason's colonial blueprint. But of course, Hollywood's choice has its own political implications. United States during the Cold War "remained anti-colonialist in principle, if not in practice, and was keen to avoid identifying too closely with European colonialism" (Mark, *Hong Kong* 26). As a result, Hong Kong remained in this film as a place "where a postwar American identity can be defined against an emerging Asian communism and the decay of European colonialism. This is a cold war Hong Kong—poised between post-1949 Chinese communism and the decay of the British Empire" (Marchetti 110). It is a city where the East and the West do

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<sup>34</sup> The Eurasian background of Nancy Kwan might not be considered as a great modification of Suzie, who is from Shanghai, because according to one of the characters in Han's novel, whom I will quote in my second chapter, Eurasian and Chinese all appear to be the same to Westerners.

not reconcile easily. In other words, the film adaptation also reflects America's Cold War policies.

This adaptation, which lets the story reach more audience than the original novel, has also received much criticism. For those who have not read the fiction, it is easy for them to misinterpret the novel based on their viewpoints of the film. That said, I am not blaming the Hollywood film for misleading interpretations of the original novel. Mason's arrogance to call him the first-rate Empire builder is against the decolonizing process after WWII. Also his focus on a prostitute at the very beginning does not seem so appealing to some Hong Kong readers. According to Luk, the portrait of Suzie is a defamation of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong women, and Mason's characterization of Suzie is even more problematic. To contemporary Hong Kong readers, Suzie is too "Chinese" to be recognized as Hongkongnese and Hong Kong is depicted as a place that accommodates both "desire and anxiety" where "communism and exoticism all rolled into one" (Luk 77). On the other hand, the setting in Hong Kong has cut off its relationship from China and the English language also limits mainlanders' access to this novel. This novel is rarely mentioned in any criticism on Hong Kong literary history. Even when it is briefly mentioned, it is for sure referred to as a typical colonial writing<sup>35</sup>.

Nevertheless, a repulsion of whiteness does not ensure an "authentic" representation

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<sup>35</sup> Zhao Xifang in *Stories of Hong Kong* briefly mentions *Tai-pan*, but not *The World of Suzie Wong*. He considers *Tai-pan* a successor of earlier colonial writing such as *Yellow and White* and therefore does not deserve critical analysis

of Hong Kong. Mason might reproduce many models in colonial writings about Hong Kong but his depiction of Suzie's world in Hong Kong is not necessarily one-dimensional. From a personal perspective, Robert (as well as Mason) depicts "authentic" Chinese elements in Hong Kong in order to secure their authority and justify their gaze upon the Eastern culture. This humanistic stance was especially important for the British during a time of decolonization. On the other hand, Mason needs Hong Kong to keep a distance from the Chinese regime and sees potential alliance between his home country and the colony. His dilemmatic attitude towards Hong Kong is well displayed in the ups and downs of the love relationship between Suzie and Robert. Eventually, these two end up in marriage, and their returning to Hong Kong in full glory seems to indicate that Robert is able to find his position in the Hong Kong society, whose future relationship to China and Britain is not yet certain. At least, for Robert, it is possible for him to continue painting the "authentic Chinese" girls and city while at the same time making sure such an "authenticity" will not be threatened by the neighboring Communist regime. In other words, although there is ambiguity in Mason's imagination of Hong Kong, which is represented by Suzie, his novel reveals how the British expatriates negotiate Chineseness in order to find their place in Hong Kong.

Such a representation of Hong Kong might be useful to other British expatriates, but is far from complete. At least, the happy ending between Robert and Suzie, between Britain and Hong Kong seems to be based on an erasure of hybridity. Robert and Suzie

seems to travel between their Chinese worlds and British worlds successfully but is this success unconditional and accessible to everyone? If the “marriage” between Hong Kong and Britain would indeed happen, as Mason imagined, what might be the results? The end of the novel makes no attempts to discuss the possible consequences if Suzie and Robert have a child together. Will s/he end up like the Suzie’s deceased bastard son? How will s/he going to deal with the prejudice on Eurasians, which is overwhelming in Hong Kong? Will that child be able to switch freely between the Western and Eastern worlds? In the next chapter, I am going to analyze the hardships for Eurasians in Hong Kong. Han Suyin, a Eurasian writer, tells her experiences in postwar Hong Kong and her striving to find her niche in a Hong Kong that is not as hospitable as the one depicted by Mason.

## CHAPTER 2

### HAN SUYIN'S DUAL WORLDS IN A *MANY-SPLENDORED THING*

Interracial romance has a long history in Hong Kong. According to Michael James Burton, sexual interaction between Western men and local women in Hong Kong started as early as when Hong Kong was occupied by Britain. He points out that Macao witnessed even earlier “sexual encounters of a Western-Oriental kind” (59). The beginning of such encounters has several historical factors. On the one hand, in these “Eastern” colonies such as Hong Kong and Macao, there was a great lack of Western women. Language also played an important role. While some low-class colonial officials had to learn basic Cantonese to communicate with local groups, Christian education made it possible for low-class local women to acquire basic English (Burton 35-66). Therefore, communication between Western men (mainly working class) and local women (most of whom did not have a prestigious social background) became possible. The colonial government in Hong Kong never legally prohibited interracial marriage but public discussion of it to a great extent, remained a taboo. Men and women involved in interracial relationships were largely looked down upon, which could be read as a further

derogation of their already low social status.

This inhibition on open discussion of interracial relationship changed dramatically after the Second World War. Due to social, economic, educational, and political changes in Hong Kong, there appeared more fictions and films about interracial love adventures in Hong Kong to “give and reinforce an air of acceptability” to this once tabooed issue (Burton 68). *The World of Suzie Wong* is one among the many fictions. As I contended in my previous chapter, Richard Mason does not simply want to create a stereotypical Orient so as to satisfy a Western gaze. Nevertheless, negative comments on this story—both the fiction and its film adaptation continue. Burton writes in his 1992 thesis that the film and its portrayal of prostitution has a quite undesirable effect on Hong Kong. To some aged Westerners, Hong Kong remains “some kind of Utopia by way of selecting at will, pick up and marry a Chinese girl” (Burton 69). Joanna Lo holds a somewhat similar opinion in her 2005 thesis. She argues that *The World of Suzie Wong* is a mere Orientalist representation of Hong Kong and the image of Hong Kong is “distorted” (7). Hong Kong is described as “a dirty, filthy and crowded place” where coolies are engaged in insignificant jobs and children have bad manners (J. Lo 7). Lo argues that Mason does not really know Hong Kong and this novel was written during his three-month stay in Hong Kong, which “is an extremely short period to come to any concrete and profound understanding of Hong Kong” (11). In addition, Mason’s status as a Western male, together with “the Oriental teachings he learnt back in London” results in his biased



creation of an unauthentic Hong Kong (11). In Lo's opinion, this bias explains why Mason chooses to write only Wanchai but not Repulse Bay, which represents a more positive image of Hong Kong. To justify her critique of *The World of Suzie Wong*, Lo reads this novel together with a novel that in her opinion, does justice to Hong Kong—*A Many-Splendored Thing* (1952) by Han Suyin. Unlike Richard Mason, who only stayed in Hong Kong for three months, Han Suyin lived in Hong Kong for many years, and thus, her depiction of Hong Kong, according to Lo, is “much more accurate and genuine” (11). Although Orientalism seems to be a driving force in both novels, Lo sees Mason reinforcing such an ideology by emphasizing the “West's superiority” while Han Suyin tends to deconstruct such superiority (19).

I certainly agree with Lo that these two novels present Hong Kong in drastically different ways, and these differences certainly have to do with the individual social and personal backgrounds of these two authors. But I do not consider these two novels entirely antagonistic. Mason's focus on Wanchai does not necessarily highlight his Western superiority and Han Suyin's inclusion of the decent places such as the Peak or Repulse Bay does not mean her defense of Hong Kong. Han Suyin never evades the issue of prostitution. She records accurately the occasions when the protagonist Suyin<sup>36</sup> runs into American soldiers “on [whose] arms hang shrill Chinese prostitutes” (Han 27).

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<sup>36</sup> The novel is autobiographic and the female protagonist is also named Suyin. To distinguish the author from the character, I use Han as the author while Suyin as the character.

According to Burton, this depiction of prostitution in *The World of Suzie Wong* to some extent turns Hong Kong into an exotic place for easy sex, but he argues that this industry of prostitution is a result that “Hong Kong brought largely upon itself” (68). Nowadays identifiable districts of brothels no longer exist, but during the post-WWII era, in Kowloon, especially Mongkok, Yau Ma Tei, there were many red-light districts (Burton 67). Prostitution was a notorious trademark for Hong Kong in postwar periods. Therefore, it is probably unfair to label Mason’s depiction of Wanchai as totally distorted. Then it is interesting to ask a question: what makes Han’s depictions of Hong Kong much more acceptable, especially by contemporary Hong Kong readers such as Lo? Regardless of the fact that Han also explicitly discusses issues such as prostitution in Hong Kong, why do her representations of Hong Kong appear to be “more authentic?” In Lo’s opinion, “authenticity” means that Han’s depictions of Hong Kong are more inclusive. More specifically, Han does not view Hong Kong as one-dimensional. She does not reduce Hong Kong into an exotic wonderland, but also a place where ordinary Chinese people fight for their lives. It is also a temporary stop for many Eurasians like Han herself. In all, Lo finds this “melting pot” image meets her expectation for Hong Kong. What makes it possible for Han to grasp the diversity in Hong Kong? According to Lo, being a Eurasian enables Han to understand Hong Kong better as a melting pot. In other words, Han’s familiarity with both Chinese and Western cultures allows her to represent Hong Kong’s hybridity, which becomes the trademark for contemporary Hong Kong.

This argument has its merits, but does a Eurasian identity necessarily enable Han Suyin to understand and appreciate diversity in Hong Kong? We should note that in the 1950s, the concept of hybridity was very different from the one that is celebrated in postcolonial studies. As I analyzed above, interracial relationship was not a popular topic in postwar Hong Kong; as the offspring of such relationships, Eurasians faced great pressure. Suyin, the protagonist in *A Many-Splendored Thing*, is not always comfortable with her identity as a Eurasian in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, she seems to embrace and enjoy her mixedness in the end. Her final acceptance of her hybridity, in my opinion, does not mean that Hong Kong was a hybrid city that was all inclusive, as Lo argues. On the contrary, Suyin's concern and anxiety about her hybridity reflects the dilemma Eurasians faced in Hong Kong. More specifically for Suyin, is there any difference between Chinese, Eurasians, and Hongkongers? What does it mean to be a Eurasian woman? How could a Eurasian woman deal with an extramarital love affair with a westerner? Han's answer to these questions is to depict Hong Kong as all-inclusive. However, is this the "authentic" image of Hong Kong?

Before my analysis of Eurasians and hybridity in post-war Hong Kong, a little biographical information of the author Han Suyin is necessary. Han Suyin is pen name of Rosalie Matilda Guanghu Zhou (周光瑚). Her father was a Chinese engineer who studied in Belgium, where he married his Belgian aristocratic wife and took her back to China. Han Suyin grew up in Beijing and later went to Brussels to study medicine. In

1938 she married Tang Baohuang and the newly-wed couple returned to China together. Han Suyin's first novel *Destination Chungking* (1942) is based on their journey back to China from Europe. Tang was a Nationalist military officer and was killed during the Chinese Civil War in 1947. Han Suyin went to Hong Kong in 1949 to practice medicine in Queen Mary hospital, where she fell in love with Ian Morrison, a married Australian war correspondent. Morrison was killed in 1950 during the Korean War. To commemorate this love affair, Han Suyin wrote her second and probably best-known novel *A Many-Splendored Thing* in this same year and published it two years later. This novel tells the love affair between a Eurasian woman Suyin and Mark Elliot (the fictional character based on Ian Morrison), starting from their first meeting and ending with Mark's death. Along with the development of their relationship, Suyin eventually abandons her original plan to go back to China and decides to stay in Hong Kong to finish a novel about this love relationship. In this fiction, Suyin returns to China twice, once before the liberation of Sichuan by the PLA (People's Liberation Army) and once after. Seeing the changes taking place in China, Suyin is determined to remain in Hong Kong even after her lover dies in the Korean War.

The subject matter of this novel seems similar to that in *The World of Suzie Wong*. Both novels focus on an interracial love affair between a Western man and an East woman. But the greatest difference lies in the different perspectives of the authors. Han experiences Hong Kong with her sensitivity as a middle-class female Eurasian, while

Mason observes Hong Kong from the eyes of a British male expatriate. The result is that readers get two different images of Hong Kong. But do their different depictions of Hong Kong mean one is superior or more authentic? Not necessarily. I argue that both authors depict Hong Kong on the basis of their understanding of Hong Kong's position between Britain and China under specific historical circumstances. With his limited knowledge about Hong Kong, Mason's representation of Hong Kong is largely based on his concern about the relationship between Britain and China. He sees Hong Kong as a potential ally for Britain in order to maintain its rule in the East. The romantic relationship between Robert and Suzie functions as a political allegory that reassures such an alliance. Mason suggests that Britain is able to appreciate the sophisticated Chinese culture in Hong Kong just like Robert does, and Hong Kong is ready to be assimilated into the British Empire in the same way that Suzie becomes legally bound to Robert. Likewise, Han's representation of Hong Kong is also based on her comparison of the Chinese and British worlds. By travelling through Chungking and Hong Kong, by dealing with both Europeans and Chinese, Suyin sympathizes for Hong Kong, which suffers a similar dilemma as she does for being a Eurasian. Unlike Mason, Han does not feel that she belongs to either powerful world. Instead, she tries hard to find her own niche between the two powers and that niche is Hong Kong.

Han and Mason's different representation, therefore does not necessarily mean one is more authentic than the other. Both authors attempt to depict Hong Kong as an

accommodating place, which allows them to find their own place in the society. The problem with Mason's picture is that it oversimplifies the relationship between China and Britain, and Hong Kong's future. Han, on the other hand, offers a more sophisticated analysis of the interrelations between these three. In the novel, the protagonist Suyin realizes the social, political and economic differences between Hong Kong and China, differences that have shaped her understanding of her own identity as a Eurasian. Nevertheless, Hong Kong's limbo between Britain and China makes it possible for Suyin to discover, or rather creates her own world in Hong Kong, a world that is neither purely Chinese nor Western.

This chapter will focus on the process during which Suyin reinterprets her mixedness, her personal experiences, and especially her love affair with Mark. I will also explore how her personal experiences interact with larger social changes in Hong Kong and the newly established communist regime in China. From a personal perspective, Suyin encounters challenges that force her to revise four aspects in her identity—her ethnical identity, her gender roles, her social class, and her patriotism. In one way or another, these four aspects overlap and interact. In Hong Kong, the social status of Eurasians is comparatively low, partially due to deep-seated racism. As a result of her low social status, Suyin also suffers economic difficulties in Hong Kong. Away from her affluent patriarchal family in Sichuan, Suyin has to support herself and her daughter with her meager income. Regardless of these challenges, changes in Communist China turns Hong

Kong into the only place where Suyin can enjoy certain rights that she no longer has in China. The free flow of population, capital, and culture in Hong Kong makes it possible for Suyin to live as an unbounded individual. There is no need for her to sacrifice her love for patriotism or chastity. In Hong Kong, a gradually westernized and modernized colony, individual love is celebrated. Hong Kong endows Suyin a many-splendored love, and allows her to experience a new self. While we should not over-interpret Han Suyin's personal experience in Hong Kong as her conscious effort to define Hong Kong locality, we should at least give her credit for offering a clear depiction of the unique Hong Kong and its sharp contrasts to China. In other words, even though Han Suyin does not necessarily see Hong Kong as a completely independent entity during the 1950s, Hong Kong was on its way to find its niche outside China.

### **A World of One's Own**

Eurasians exist in both mainland China and Hong Kong but being a Eurasian has different connotations in China and Hong Kong. According to Emma Jinhua Teng, during the first half of the twentieth century in China, most Eurasians were offspring of well-educated Chinese men and their Western wives. It is most likely that the couple met in the West where the Chinese scholars or diplomats studied and worked. Often times, these intellectuals and scholars returned home with their Western wives (Teng 46). In Hong Kong however, "the interracial contact between the sexes was predominantly one of

foreigners frequenting brothels or taking Chinese girls (often prostitutes) as mistresses rather than earnestly seeking a stable liaison with a view to marriage” (Burton 56). In other words, many Eurasians in Hong Kong were illegitimate children resulted from temporary sexual relationships between Western men and Hong Kong women. Therefore, argues Teng “Chinese-Western intermarriage had a somewhat elite aura in China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Hong Kong, in contrast...the prejudice against Eurasians stemmed not only from the ‘impurity’ of foreign blood, but also from the stigma of (imputed) illegitimacy” (199). Han Suyin belongs to the elite class in China where her father is an intellectual and her mother a European. Both her parents have quite prestigious family backgrounds. In Hong Kong, however, her Eurasian identity implies a potential stigma.

The divergent perception of Eurasians in China and Hong Kong partially explains why Suyin repels the idea to start a love affair with Mark at the beginning of the novel. Falling in love with a Western man would mean to repeat the despicable interracial sexual stereotypes in Hong Kong, further deteriorating her already stigmatized status as a Eurasian. Moreover, she does not want to produce (if possible) any victim, namely a bastard child, who will suffer her dilemma again. Suyin’s adopted daughter Mei tells her about the bullying of a Eurasian girl at school: “The children all make fun of her. They say her father is a foreign devil. They say she smells bad. They laugh at her” (129).

The fact that prejudice and bullying even exist among little children shows the most



significant challenge for Eurasians in postwar Hong Kong. That is, postwar Hong Kong was not yet a “melting pot” that accepted racial mixedness. Most likely, Eurasians belong to only one of their dual worlds. They had to choose to be either Chinese or Westerners. Due to the generally low social status of Eurasians and their parents, most Eurasians identified themselves as pure Chinese. Even for Eurasians who were from prestigious families such as the Ho Tung family, they chose to live as Chinese. Teng’s research reveals that their Chinese way of living includes taking Chinese names, reciting Chinese classics, performing Chinese rites, and emphasizing their Chinese blood (195-216).

Han’s Hong Kong, as Lo correctly argues, includes various circles and seems to be all-inclusive. But these circles do not overlap. The impossibility for East and West to mix probably challenges the common perception of Hong Kong as a melting pot of the Orient. Instead, everyone in Hong Kong “met and many stayed apart, divided by hedged of prejudice and hearsay. However much one shook the mixture, it stratified into immiscible layers again” (Han 65). To Suyin, her Eurasian identity does not automatically translate into a free switch between Chinese and Western worlds. In fact, Suyin gets a better understanding of the barriers between these two worlds after her stay in Hong Kong.

Ever since the Chinese Civil War broke out, Hong Kong had become a haven for refugees—Western missionaries who were expelled by the communists, rich entrepreneurs from Shanghai and other big cities, Chinese Nationalist military members, and Western expatriates. These groups of people did not physically live apart from each

other, but their worlds were largely separated. Han offers a very astute description of this situation. People from different social backgrounds scatter around the Peak. On the top of the hill are flats for “European government servants” and “affluent Chinese mostly from Shanghai, who have turned these districts into small bustling replicas of their own city” (26). Below that, in the outlying districts “are the squatters’ wooden shacks, grouped into camps” (26). The residents on the Peak and those living in the outlying districts were so close yet so far away. Han reveals her awareness of their distance in a highly lyrical way: “Kept away from the center by demolition, they nestle at the foot of the hills in the outlying districts; crouch at the doorstep of the hilltop mansions of the wealthy; insinuate between the layer-cake blocks of government flats and the busy main streets; line the orderly roads along which the latest, Buicks glide to the swimming beaches” (26). Looking at these two worlds makes Suyin contemplate her own situation. Like those living in the shacks, Suyin also suffers economic pressures. And this pressure is largely due to her ethnicity as a Eurasian. She reveals her difficulty in an early monologue: “My salary is paid at the local Chinese rate since I am a Chinese, but I am living at the Guest House on a European (or near European) standard. The money is not enough for board and lodging for myself and my daughter, let alone incidentals” (18). But what strikes her more is the insurmountable gaps between the two worlds, the rich and the poor, the “West” and the “East.” In 1950s Hong Kong, ethnicity and economic status together divided the society into different classes. Many Chinese youth, who received Western

education and abandoned Chinese traditions, became “a marginal man” (Han 145).

Suyin’s situation is more complicated because being a Eurasian, she cannot get rid of the biological mixture in her blood. Her anxiety increases in Hong Kong since she sees no chance for her being accepted into either world. In Hong Kong: “East and West don’t really ever mix... they’ll always be apart” (33). Everyone in Hong Kong, including Eurasians “can’t be both East and West at the same time. [They] have to choose between the two” (33). Suyin, as she claims, initially chooses to be a Chinese.

Suyin would have returned to China as planned, had she not met Mark. Mark is different from other Europeans that Suyin used to know. Most Westerners treat Eurasians and the Chinese side in them with disrespect. For example, Franklin, the boss of Suyin’s sister Suchen, calls the Chinese “cannibals” and questions Suyin for her failure to understand foreigners given the fact that her mother is a European. There are also those who appear to recognize Suyin’s “full Chineseness” in order to have easy sex with her (79). Mark is different. As a war correspondent, Mark has been exposed to diverse cultures, and he treats them with utmost respect. He never regards one culture as superior to another. Suyin is grateful for Mark’s acceptance of her Eurasian identity, especially her Eurasian look. In a sentimental way, Suyin recalls her childhood unhappiness resulted from this non-Chinese look: “When I was a child, I felt myself wrestling desperately against contempt, the imposition of a vision not mind, the assumption of the unearned superiority. Now for the first time in my life, a man had found me beautiful” (103). Thus,

after Suyin's encounter with the annoying Franklin, she cannot help recalling how considerate and open-minded Mark is. He "would never try to misunderstand others" (111). In addition, Mark is able to recognize and accept duality in Suyin. He tells Suyin: "you have trained yourself to have both East and West. You have a dual mind, and I envy you the way in which you become different worlds, different beings. There is more richness to your life than we poor one-world people possess" (79-80). His love soothes her anxiety about her marginalized status in Hong Kong, and his recognition of her two worlds encourages her to live comfortably with her Eurasian identity. She asserts that being a Eurasian "only means that [her] mother was European, [her] father Chinese...The English of the colonies and the concession made it a shame and an inferiority to be a Eurasian" but she will not victimize herself under such thinking (154). She ceases to view herself as an inferior Eurasian and refuses to choose between the East and the West. For Suyin, dreaming to become a full Chinese or aping the White's behaviors are manifestations of the trap of the state of mind "created by false values, prejudice, ignorance" (198). In all, Mark enlightens Suyin, assisting her to get rid of the biased state of mind of Eurasians and embrace her dual worlds.

Suyin's celebration of her hybridity in Hong Kong is noteworthy but we should not equalize her world with the Hong Kong society. In fact, this world, to a great extent, is a private world that Suyin creates for her and Mark indeed because she is not allowed to have dual worlds in the Hong Kong society. In the first half of the novel, Suyin, although

sexually attracted to Mark, is very pessimistic about their relationship. She tells Mark, “there is no place, in time, or in space, for us...nowhere...we are doomed before we begin” (49-50). This despair disappears when she accepts Mark’s “theory” on her dual worlds. The harsh reality is that not everyone shares Mark’s theory or accepts her dual worlds. Unlike Mason who portrays Robert’s marriage to Suzie as a fairytale that receives only congratulation but no opposition, Han is very honest about the obstacles for her alter ego Suyin and Mark outside their private world. This honesty, in my opinion, is her greatest contribution to our understanding of Hong Kong locality in 1950 because she does not exaggerate the mixture of Chinese and Western groups. In the second half of the novel when her affair with Mark becomes known to the upper British class, Suyin loses her job as a doctor and becomes unwelcomed among the upper class. Suyin is not able to dismantle the barrier between her dual worlds, just as Mark cannot understand why human beings kill each other in the Korean War, merely for the sake of different ideologies. However, she is able to embrace her hybrid identity in the private world she creates.

### **The Promising Hong Kong**

Although *A Many-Splendored Thing* is Han Suyin’s second book, it is not the first time that she mentions Hong Kong. Her first autobiographical novel *Destination Chungking* (1942) also briefly mentions Hong Kong, a mere “way station” on her way

back home. In that novel, Suyin and her husband only stayed in Hong Kong for three days, and they were like “strangers in a strange city” but she got a firm impression that Hong Kong was China. Regardless of the Victorian buildings in this city, “war in China...was reflected in the tempo of Hong Kong” (62-63). Staying in Hong Kong reminded Suyin of Peking, while her sojourn in England “became an unreal memory” (63). In this novel, Suyin is very comfortable being a Chinese in the Chinese city Hong Kong. Her familiarity with the Western world fades away.

Not everyone believes in Han’s claimed “pure” Chineseness. Mimi Chan, for instance, questions her patriotism in *Destination Chungking*. Chan goes back to Han’s five-volume autobiography, where she admits that this novel is merely a “fairy book fabulation of the narrative” because she meant to project a favorable image of China during wartime (149). According to Chan, the reason why Han has to create a positive image of China during Sino-Japanese War, is that China needs to gain support from China’s allied nations. Revealing too much “uncivilized” truth about China would frighten the Western readers away. Therefore, Chan is suspicious of Han’s claim of Chineseness. Chan specifically mentions *A Many-Splendored Thing* because in this novel Han’s “insistence on her mixed culture,” and her modified “style towards the tastes of the Western reader” (154-156) are totally against the patriotism expressed in her first novel. Chan questions Han’s “literary honesty” and considers Han “an emotional exhibitionist” who exploits Ian Morrison to publish her “sublimated many-splendoured love affair”

(149, 151). Chan is not the only one who criticizes this novel for moral reasons. When the book came out in 1952, many critics from *The Times* and *The Observer*, who personally knew Ian Morrison, considered that the revelation of this extramarital relationship damaged Ian's reputation as well as hurt his wife and children (Chan 151-152). Chan more or less shares this moralist view. She even traces back to a scandal of Han Suyin when she seduced her Belgian mentor in order to gain a scholarship. For Chan, Han's immorality, her inconsistency about her Chinese identity, and her lavish writing style together result in the fact that she "is not highly regarded by Chinese 'intellectuals' in Hong Kong and abroad" (148).

A moralistic judgment of Han's extramarital affair with Ian Morrison and her decision to publish it is not my concern in this chapter. What I am interested in is that Han's depiction of Hong Kong in this novel does differ greatly from that she presents in *Destination Chungking*. Han reveals her intention in the preface to *A Many-Splendored Thing*: "European authors write with great beauty and perception about Asians. I write as an Asian, with all the pent-up emotions of my people. What I say will annoy many people who prefer the more conventional myths brought back by writers on the Orient. All I can say is that I try to tell the truth. Truth, like surgery, may hurt, but it cures" (ix). Two words are noteworthy: "Asian" and "truth." The story of *A Many-Splendor Thing* takes place in Chungking and Hong Kong, a pure Chinese city in Han's first novel. What makes her abandon the word "Chinese" and adopt "Asian" instead? In my opinion,

labeling herself as an Asian writer, Han emphasizes her hybrid identity and plays down her Chineseness in order to show her objectivity while depicting China. But on the other hand, her intention to uncover the “truth” about China, somehow emphasizes her Chineseness, or at least her familiarity of China because of her Chineseness. Like many authors during the New Culture Movement<sup>37</sup>, Han aims to use her writing to cure the sick China by uncovering the sometimes ugly “truth.” Literary creation to my mind, is not about telling truth and there is never any “absolute truth” in literature. By adopting this word, however, Han asserts her responsibility to represent a “real Orient” and her Chineseness also endows her authority to make claims about “authenticity” I do not see any scientific truth in Han Suyin’s decision to deemphasize her Chineseness in *A Many-Splendor Thing*. Nevertheless, I am interested in the historical contexts that allow her to find this “truth.” Or is the so-called truth, as Chan argues, another of her fabrications to cater the Western readers, who now expect a different image of China?

Overall, Han has chosen to identify herself as a Chinese in her life, just like many other Eurasians. However, her claim of Chineseness is not entirely consistent in her entire life. According to Teng, there are various changes when Han Suyin “grappled with the

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<sup>37</sup> The most famous example among these writers probably is Lu Xun, who abandons his medical studies in Japan and becomes a writer instead. He considers it more important to cure Chinese people’s mind than their bodies. Therefore, literary creation is compared to medical operation, both of which will scientifically improve the mind and body of Chinese people respectively. Han Suyin is also a doctor and I see a similar emphasis in her preface, especially in her word choice such as “surgery” and “cure.”



ambiguity of Eurasianness and discrimination from both sides, but she ultimately chose to proclaim her Chineseness and took on the role of a spokesperson for China to the West” (208). Yet there are also times when she “expressed repugnance at having to masquerade as either ‘pure Chinese’ or ‘pure’ European and hid her Eurasian identity, which she came to embrace with defiance” (Teng 208). Han’s Chineseness is highlighted in *Destination Chungking* mainly because of two reasons. First of all, as Mimi Chan rightly argues, Han Suyin has to create an idealized China so as to gain support from allies of the Kuomintang (hereafter KMT) government. Secondly, during this time period, Han was married to Tang Baohuang. Han Suyin’s Eurasian identity sometimes puts Tang’s loyalty to the country in question, especially during war time. While Tang sometimes lies to his colleagues that Han is pure Chinese with a westernized face, he also “exhorts Han to act more ‘Chinese’” (Teng 210). To Tang, being more Chinese means that Han has to play her gender roles in accordance with Chinese traditions. To Han herself, she tries to display her Chineseness through her patriotism. She is eager to “do something for China, to serve the people—both as a doctor and as a writer” (Teng 211). Not only does she treat patients, she also explicitly shows her patriotism in her writing. We can see multiple layers of her Chineseness in *Destination Chungking*. On the one hand, Han Suyin emphasizes her patriotic devotion to the country in her glorification of a wartime China. On the other hand, she portrays herself as a caring and submissive wife, who is familiar with Chinese culture and tradition.

Another remarkable period when Han emphasized her Chineseness was during the Cultural Revolution. At a time when China was closed to the rest of the world, Han was among the few who were permitted to visit China. She was denied entrance to certain countries because she was accused of propagandizing for the Chinese Communist Party<sup>38</sup>. In one talk in Paris<sup>39</sup>, Han specifically talked about the role of women in Cultural Revolution. She talks about three aspects in women's life—their sex life, their family structure, and their national pride. According to Han, “venereal diseases are under control and contraception pills are not needed because Chinese women are very serious and well-disciplined in terms of sex” (2). Han also refutes biased and fake Western reports, saying that “People's Commune does not change family structure in China. Women still play an important role in family but they are now equal to their husbands” (2). There is no exploitation or oppression in terms of gender relations. Finally, she argues that Chinese women “share the same national pride with the rest of the country because of the successful explosion of nuclear bombs in China” (2). Overall, in many of Han's global

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<sup>38</sup> See *Han Suying ziliao ji*. This collection contains many news reports (mainly from Hong Kong newspapers) on Han Suyin's talks during the 1960s and 1970s. Somehow the title of this collection uses Han Suying 韓素英 instead of Han Suyin 韓素音. All translations from this collection are mine. Leftist newspapers call her a patriotic writer and argues that she witnesses the gradual development of the country. Rightist newspapers however, claim that she is the “running dog” for the Communist Party. According to one report in *Tian Tian Daily Newspaper*, Han Suyin is denied access to the Philippines because she “propagandizes for Chinese Communist government and dares to overthrow the Philippine government” (1).

<sup>39</sup> This reported was first published in *Zhengwu Bao* 正午報 on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1970, collected in *Han Suying ziliao ji*.

talks and publications during the Cultural Revolution, she introduced the West a positive and developing China, which she had first-hand information.

Unlike the devoted patriot in *Destination Chungking* or the “Chinese ambassador” in the 1960s and 1970s, Han in 1949 suffered significantly from the ambiguity of Eurasianness. This ambiguity gradually develops through her alter ego in *A Many-Splendored Thing*. In the beginning, Suyin still appears to be very patriotic. Her greatest dream is to go back to China, practice medicine, and help her countrymen. Suyin repetitively utters her eagerness to return. Even though Hong Kong and China are cut off by the islands and mountains on Kowloon, China is “always felt” because “China is the reason why [she is] here” (29-30). She confirms with her Chinese friends: “nothing holds me to Hong Kong. Everything pulls me back to China, even my daughter” (45). As the story develops, her desire to go back to China diminishes. In the end, Suyin chooses to stay in Hong Kong to write about her deceased lover because “it was the only place where [she] could write this book. [She] could not write it in China, and [she] could not go anywhere else. So here [she] stayed, took another job and worked by day and wrote by night” (287).

Obviously, Suyin’s affair with Mark plays a pivotal role in her changing decisions. Mark Elliot, the caring, generous, and understanding lover, makes it possible for Suyin to find her own worlds. Indeed, this affair causes her much pain and suffering, not just because of moral concerns, but also due to her Eurasian identity. However, it is also this

love that makes Suyin contemplate on her Chineseness. In spite of its significance, I would say that love, the many-splendored thing, is only a catalyst for Suyin's renewed interpretation of her mixedness. A more important factor is the place where this love takes place. In Suyin's opinion, the love affair between Mark and her can only take place in Hong Kong, "not in London, not in Chungking" (153). What is so special about Hong Kong in Suyin's opinion? Why it is the only place where she can love freely? I argue there are mainly two interrelated factors that make Hong Kong the only place where Suyin can enjoy the many-splendored love. For one thing, Hong Kong is always in limbo ever since the Chinese Civil War starts. No one knows what the future would be for Hong Kong, China, and individuals commuting between these two places. Compared to the transient society, love (or human emotion) seems to be the only thing that lasts. Meanwhile, in the fast changing Hong Kong, it is possible for individuals to liberate themselves from traditional values. In Suyin's case, her marriage status is not a barrier since she is no longer expected to cling to her chastity as a widow. It is therefore possible for her to get out of the bondage of traditional womanhood and liberate her love towards Mark.

Hong Kong in 1950 is a city full of transients, and nothing seems to last. Every day, hundreds of people arrive in Hong Kong and its "population is nearly three times what it was" (23). People arrive and depart. It is an interesting phenomenon in post-war Hong Kong that each newcomer is ready to leave at whatever time. Han writes, "each man,

despite his air of belonging, a transient, claiming as his origin a village back in South China, refusing to belong to the Colony, maintaining his status of passer-by even when he works here all his life, even when his children are born here, sometimes even when he is born here” (27). Hong Kong is only their temporal stop but never their final destination.

The reason why Hong Kong fails to create a sense of belonging is that the future of this city is not yet determined. People are not sure whether the KMT is able to hold the South. If the Communists take the entire China, will they cross the border and conquer Hong Kong? If the Communists “invade” Hong Kong, will Britain defend it, or will Britain be able to defend Hong Kong. Individual effort is so insignificant that the majority people in Hong Kong act indifferently (or rather helplessly) towards politics. In fact, what people in postwar Hong Kong can do is *Carp Diem*. At least, they can have “golf and swimming” if not “politics and votes” (67). Hong Kong, as I argued in Chapter One, was a harbor where sailors came for entertainment during the 1950s. People learn to entertain themselves and forget about politics, which is beyond their control.

In the novel, Han provides some accurate, albeit highly metaphorical descriptions of the transient nature of postwar Hong Kong, a place that “no one knows where heaven with its stars ends, and the earth with its lights begins” (33). It is the “overhanging rock poised above the abyss” (191). It is like “a little gap, a slip of comet, small interstice stretched between fixed stars, come-and-go rock” (228). Hong Kong resembles “the seawet rock” and “lives on borrowed time” (254). Using her medical expertise, Han sees

Hong Kong as “tiny excrescence of the Chinese mainland, rock of exile to so many—poised, expectant, waiting for the future” (124). Since Suyin knows that Hong Kong is a transient place, why does she want to have a temporary relationship? An easy answer would be that Suyin surrenders to her sexual desire. She needs a love relationship to entertain herself just like those people who need golf and swimming. Suyin admits that Mark is the first man that she wants, after so many years of abnormal hatred of men. In the past, even the thought of men “was just frightening and impossible” (50). A more glorious reason that Suyin herself probably would agree is that in this impermanent world, love is the only thing that lasts and eternalizes one’s transience. An official answer provided by Suyin herself is that Mark is perfect. He sees something in this transient world that nobody else is able to see: “In the many worlds in Hong Kong its many worlds, in its diversity, its contradictions oblivious of each other, all that tends to make Hong Kong fall apart, he sees hope for survival, the necessary suppleness to meet change and the days to come” (254). He sees hope for survival of the whole city as well as for individuals. To Suyin specifically, she survives her dual worlds, and she also restores her femininity. Hong Kong promises her a new gender role that she is not be able to enjoy in China, especially in Communist China.

While Suyin believes in the eternity of love, she also has moral concerns about whether she should start the love affair and publish a novel about it. As was mentioned, this novel was very controversial when it came out. Han’s confessional portrayal of the

sexual love between the character Suyin and Mark is irritating to some moralists who label her writings as “pornography” (Chan 141). To make things worse, extramarital affair is still a taboo to many ordinary readers, not to mention moralists. The reason why Han dares to neglect all these social morals has something to do with the transience in the city because she is not sure when political changes would interrupt this love or even kill them. In the novel, Mark is initially surprised at Suyin’s decision to write a novel about their love. To persuade Mark (or more importantly, her readers), Suyin cites an anecdote from Shen Fu’s *A Floating Life*. Shen Fu lives in the Qing Dynasty and *A Floating Life* tells stories of his life in four categories,<sup>40</sup> including his marriage to Yun, his misfortunate career life, his hobbies, and his travels. The anecdote that Suyin cites tells a story about Yun’s wish to find a concubine for her husband. Unfortunately, the girl is sold to someone else. Regretted that she cannot find another good woman to take care of her husband, Yun is constantly troubled by this loss. According to Shen Fu, this incident indirectly causes Yun’s early death and he can only commemorate Yun in his writing. I think there are three reasons why Suyin uses this example. First of all, Suyin emphasizes the significance of love. Shen Fu’s love towards Yun is something that supports him in his floating life. Likewise, Suyin needs Mark’s love to survive the transient Hong Kong. Secondly, Suyin highlights the power of literature. Yun dies early but she is able to live

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<sup>40</sup> The book has another version with six chapters. However, it is generally agreed that the last two chapters were added by someone else.

forever in Shen Fu's writing about her. Therefore to Suyin, even though one day the love between her and Mark would come to a stop because of political reasons, Mark will live forever in her novel. In reality, this is exactly what happened to Han Suyin and Ian Morrison. Finally and most importantly, Suyin uses this anecdote to defend herself. Yun's decision to find a concubine for her husband might sound unacceptable to readers who are not familiar with the traditional Chinese womanhood. Mark for instance, wonders why Yun is willing to share her husband with another woman. In Suyin's opinion, moral values never last forever because different time periods have different criteria. Although Yun's support for polygamy sounds "immoral," her "unselfishness and wifely generosity would be highly praised" because they were "moral for their own times" (Han 170). Contrary to the moralists who "have no place in an art gallery," Shen Fu's writing and the characterization of Yun will be celebrated (170). Treating Yun as her role model, Suyin finds an excuse to accept Mark even before he gets a divorce. She argues that maybe her decision to "share" Mark with his wife seems immoral to their contemporaries, but it is indeed glorious and sublime in their own world, in Hong Kong. After Mark's death, Suyin's decision to write a novel about their relationship further glorifies and even eternalizes their love. In addition, Suyin realizes that moral values always change. What she values in the past, including her gender roles, her chastity and her patriotism, does not have equally important meanings to her now. From here on, I think Suyin is ready to sacrifice her patriotism for her love but she is hesitant. It does not take long for her to



totally abandon her plan to go back to China after she visits the newly-established People's Republic of China in 1949. The new China helps her make her decision.

Both Han and her alter ego Suyin are highly aware of traditional womanhood in China, maybe because of Tang Baohuang's insistence. As a widow in China, Suyin is "not supposed to get married again... [and she is] altogether above temptation" (Han 21). Her gender role as a woman in her mind does not involve sexual desires. Being a woman means that she is the mother of Mei and a daughter of the Zhou family. Mark awakens her sexual desire and recovers her ability to love again, but she finds out that Communist China does not accept this westernized femininity. Her entrapment between these different definitions of womanhood, is a miniature of the evolving history of women in Chinese feminism. According to Tani Barlow, there are two pivotal terms in Chinese feminism: *nüxing* 女性 and *funü* 婦女. Both *nüxing* and *funü* are Chinese translations for women, depending on different historical periods. *Funü* is a traditional term in China, which defines women's gender role in their constitution of the genealogy. *Funü* acts as a frame of "differential *jia* [family]-relation, never as transcendent category" (Barlow 134). Before the fall of Qing dynasty, there was no such term as women/ *nüxing*. The circulation of this new term, "erupted...during the 1920s when treaty port intellectuals overthrew the literary language of the Confucius canon" (Barlow 140). But when young intellectuals borrowed this term from Western ideology, they also imported Western binaries imprinted on the "inferior" sex such as female passivity, biological inferiority,

intellectual inability, etc. Communist party theorist thus argued that *nüxing* was “a product of bourgeois preoccupation” and they adopted the term *funü* again because it “found its referential framework in revolutionary practice” (Barlow 142-43). But the genealogical emphasis in this term is deemphasized. What is implied in the use of *funü* in communist China is that the liberation of Chinese women/ *funü* was inseparable from the victory of the nation. Women are not defined by their role in their family or genealogy but by their contribution to the nation in terms of revolution during war and production after 1949.

Han does not consciously distinguish *funü* from *nüxing*. Her confusion and ambiguity about her gender roles, however, correspond to the switching adoptions of these two terms in China. In the novel, Suyin performs her role as a submissive wife, in order to be “more Chinese” before coming to Hong Kong. And in China, a good woman or “family girl” as Suyin terms, “doesn’t go out with a foreigner” (35). After returning to China after PRC is founded, Suyin finds an annihilation of individuality all together. Love is not a private matter anymore. “New Love was founded on respect and identical political ideas. It was impossible for individuals belonging to conflicting classes to love each other. Personal emotions were a function of class consciousness and political ideologies” (Han 215-216). Communism demands a renunciation of self, a sacrifice for the great nation. Therefore, returning to China would mean an end to the relationship between Suyin and Mark. Hong Kong thus becomes the only place for her and Mark to

love and to survive. Hong Kong, home to multiple worlds and diversity, allows women to perform different gender roles. In this novel, Han portrays quite a few women characters but they do not seem to represent a uniform womanhood. Among Suyin's acquaintances, there are wives of missionaries, who are devoted mothers and wives. There are elegant ladies from Shanghai, who continue their bourgeois life in Hong Kong. There are Eurasians who have the freedom to love. There are also female servants, who are able to leave their patriarchal families to lead a new life. Every woman character is allowed to live like a *nüxing* instead of *funü*.

### **The Deteriorating China**

Suyin is very sensitive to the changes in the relationship between Hong Kong and China, which enable her to revise not only her ethnical identity but also her gender roles. Staying in Hong Kong makes it possible for her to have a better vision of China and Britain. She compares her situation to a goldfish, "which sees both sides of his glass tank at once" (254). Obviously, living in the tank, the goldfish no longer belongs to either side, but can only survive in its own world. Now that Suyin fully comprehends the differences among Hong Kong, China, and Britain, there is no chance that she will return to her "full Chineseness." Her stay in Hong Kong makes it impossible for her to "go to China wholehearted, for [she] cannot deny what [she has] known, revile what [she has] loved, hate what has made [her] live" (Han 247).

The most visible difference between Hong Kong and China is that Hong Kong—regardless of its uncertain future, is developing while China is decaying. Economically speaking, Hong Kong is a fine place for business, which “means everything to Hong Kong” (Han 44). Even though barriers among different worlds exist, the desire to make money allows people in Hong Kong to forget about politics, about immorality, and even racial differences. According to Burton, Eurasians successfully assimilated with Whites in work place mainly because of their distinguished language skills (47). Long before hybridity is accepted as a racial issue, the business world in Hong Kong is already hybrid. Unlike the prospering Hong Kong, China is engulfed in the Civil War. The first time Suyin returns to Sichuan, she finds out that war has destroyed everything: old heritage is collapsing, and new order is yet to come. The comparison between China and Hong Kong is sharper if we juxtapose Han’s representations of Hong Kong and China in this novel with those in *Destination Chungking*. In that novel, Suyin views Hong Kong as a wretched place. “In Hong Kong harbor great drifts of gray, dirty clouds crept, amoeba-like, over the sea and sky. The air was still and sultry, the water a dull sheen reflecting the heavily brooding sky...Hong Kong, like a huge anthill with its narrow streets and slatternly tenements, sprawled along the base of the mountain whose peak went up into the skies” (55). Notice how many derogative words Han uses in this short description. This is her first impression about Hong Kong and probably the only impression she has during her short visit. China, which is right after the mountains, is a giant that dwarfs

Hong Kong.

Han's interpretation of the contrast between Hong Kong and China reverses in her second book. China becomes the dirty and wretched place. When Suyin flies from Hong Kong back to Chungking, she is astonished at the decay of the whole city. Her journey from the airport in Chungking back home is a torture. There is no transportation and she has to walk in the heat. Along her journey, she

saw, with dumb surprise, the dirty rags instead of the clean black silk of the airfield coolies; watched the faces creased with poverty, like beds that had been slept in; heard the brutal voices of officialdom, instead of the affable tones of the well-fed Hong Kong government servants; watched the open smuggling, under the coarse mat shed where a bogus Customs inspection was held; and remembered Hong Kong, so clean in comparison, the Hong Kong of the rich who can afford to travel by plane. My heart tightened, for here all was decrepitude and inefficiency. (91)

Everywhere in Chungking Suyin only sees "neglect and squalor and decay" (117). There is no hope for the city whose people are inert and corruption of the rulers pervades.

Chungking is no longer the amicable city in her memory. Her sister Suchen is hysterical for being trapped in such a terrible place. She cannot wait to leave Chungking, leave the Family, and leave China.

What leads to this change and what causes the decay of Chungking? Han ascribes

these to the war. The defeat of the KMT in many major cities in China including Shanghai, Wuhan has resulted in banishment of missionaries. What is also cast out is a humanistic care among Chinese people. In Chungking, people are used to hearing shots of executing convicted communists. The communists get rid of all religious worship and “turn that emotion into a frightening and uncontrollable rampage, and public execution” (Han 210). As a doctor, Suyin’s goal is to save people, but in China, she only witnesses killing.

The Chinese Civil War also produces thousands of refugees who swamp Hong Kong. But neither the Communists nor the Nationalists want to deal with them. “Refugees were kept alive by the Hong Kong government, in camps. Formosa did not want them. China did not want them. Hong Kong fed them” (Han 165). There are also patients who are pushed back and forth along the border with China. No one wants these patients, especially the lepers. It is two missionaries, possibly those driven out from China, who set up a temporary leprosarium to accommodate these people. It is also in Hong Kong that Suyin can continue her career as a doctor. China does not need her because according to Suyin, what the Chinese people need is a treatment of their emotions. Moreover, China does not welcome Suyin. Her lover Mark works for “an imperialist paper in a bourgeois democracy” and must be a potential spy (186). Her situation is no better. She belongs to the “bourgeois class, which will have to be re-educated in the People’s Democratic Dictatorship” (168). Chinese are no less exclusive

than the British, whose colonial government in Hong Kong at least keeps many alive, including Suyin.

Therefore, Suyin the goldfish sees in Hong Kong the glass tank, both China and Britain. This dual vision even forces her to reexamine colonialism, which for her is not completely detrimental to Hong Kong and China. Her new understanding of the colonial government betrays what she was taught in China. She is no longer able to serve the new country with heart and soul. Her critique of colonialism also ceases. While she is able to see clearly the “true” Britain and China, Suyin is also trapped in her glass tank—Hong Kong. A goldfish needs water to survive in the tank. What is the “water” for Suyin in Hong Kong?

### **Is Humanism the Answer?**

Let's return to a question that I posed at the beginning of this chapter. Why is Han Suyin's Hong Kong more acceptable to contemporary readers? The reason is that Hong Kong in her 1952 writing resembles the “disappearing city” as Abbas defines. According to Abbas, Hong Kong during the 1980s was a city of transience, economic prosperity, and political indifference. This image is very similar to the one outlined by Han in *A Man-Splendored Thing*: “Hong Kong, excrescence off the coast of China, entrepôt of commerce and social anachronism, island of monopolies, where destitution is a punishable offense and refugee camps bloomed; Hong Kong poised between land and sea,

dependent on China for its birth and the existence of its sumptuous capitalist enterprise” (227). But there are certain differences between these two time periods. As a Eurasian in Hong Kong in the early 1950s, Suyin encounters racial discrimination, gender inequality, and economic pressure; challenges that she has not experienced when she was in mainland China. Nevertheless, she is courageous to embrace her mixedness, regardless of all the problems that she has to face for being a Eurasian. Hong Kong, in Suyin’s mind, is a city that allows one to find his/her own niche as long as they have pride in their own identity. In Hong Kong, Suyin meets people from all social spectrums, including noble British expatriates such as the Palmer-Jones, Western missionaries, Eurasians like herself, and many more refugees and street sleepers. But the noble ones like Adeline Palmer-Jones does not stand alone: “The poor have her always with them. They justify her existence. She is the apex, they are the base, of the pyramid. They are the obverse of the coin of life on which her features prosper. One is not without the other. They stand equal under Heaven” (253). In a humanistic way, Suyin advocates an equal treatment of the poor. Is it because of her change of social status that makes her sympathize with the underprivileged class? Not necessarily.

Han expresses similar intention in her first novel *Destination Chungking*, where she writes: “Coolies. The man power of China...They keep life going; they dig in the field, they plant and harvest. Everything in China depends upon them. Coolies. I would make the word ‘coolie’ a name of honor before the world!” (366-67). Critics have questioned



Han's sincerity for glorifying China during the war time for a couple of political and diplomatic reasons. I see some consistency in her "glorification" of the underprivileged class, and this consistency has to do with Han's elitism. In *A Many-Splendored Thing* Suyin is very honest about the privileges that she enjoyed for being part of the elite class when she was in China. She admits that "it is this privilege, graft and corruption [that] had made possible [her] expensive hybrid education and which in turn had made it possible for Mark and [her] to meet, to comprehend each other, and to love" (115). After Suyin arrives in Hong Kong, she loses her privileged social status, which is associated with her Eurasian identity. In a very positive way, these new challenges propel Suyin to insist on her hybrid identity. This hybridity in turn, allows Suyin to see the potential of Hong Kong as a city for anyone with "Gold Fish's eyes." But is Suyin's Hong Kong experience applicable to others, especially refugees who are originally from China and now are under the British governance?

In this novel there are random vignettes—which might be another reason that some consider her writing style "lavish"—that depict various experiences of migrants and refugees from China. Among them, there are affluent businessmen who are afraid that the new communist regime will take away their private property. There are also prostitutes who refuse to be redressed and decide to continue their profession in Hong Kong. The most touching story is about a maidservant (or a slave in Han's novel) named Oh-no. Oh-no has been working for the Hsu family. When the rich family fled from mainland China

to Hong Kong, Oh-no was packed together with the luggage and put in an airplane. In Hong Kong, she was sexually assaulted by her male master and physically abused by her female masters until one day, she was saved by the police and sent to Po Leung Kuk (保良局 hereafter PLK). Suyin considers that there are at least two factors that save Oh-no: her courage and the juridical system in Hong Kong. In old China, according to Suyin, a slave girl like Oh-no would never dare to report domestic violence to police. Even if she did, “no one would listen to the word of a slave girl against her master” (168). Therefore, Oh-no has the “courage of a hero” (168). But later in the novel, it is revealed that it is not Oh-no who actively went to the police and reported the crime of her masters. Oh-no was “looking at the sea” as a soothing method after she was abused (193). A policeman found her on street and took her to the police station and there a British policeman, or a “foreign devil” in Oh-no’s words, saved her. Regardless of Oh-no’s intention, she is saved for sure because according to Suyin, PLK, “the Institution for the Protection of Virtue” shelters “lost children, ill-used slave girls, and girls who have been kidnapped for immoral purposes” (192). And it is the responsibility of the “Secretary for Chinese Affairs of the Colony” to supervise this institution. Once again, Suyin seems to indicate that it is the colonial government, which she is taught to resent as an imperialist and colonial entity, that turns out to save the Chinese people in Hong Kong.

A close examination of the case of Oh-no and PLK tells a different story. According to Angelina Chin, the major purpose of Po Leung Kuk was to “provide relief for

prostitutes, *mui tsai* (female bondservants), and other women and children who were abused, trafficked, or otherwise prevented from returning to their homes” (135). Oh-no certainly belongs to the category of *mui tsai* and Han’s documentation of her case has historical basis. But according to Chin, PLK had no direct connection with the colonial government. It was founded in 1878 by Chinese elites. The purpose to set up PLK and other institutions was due to the fear that “the British would dominate the local administration” (Chin 137). There are also different views about the motivation for Chinese elites to set up institutions such as PLK, Tung Wah Hospital (東華醫院) and Man Mo Temple (文武廟). John Mark Carroll argues that through establishing these institutions, “Chinese merchant elites were able to achieve social and political prestige, to protect Chinese interests under foreign rule, and to express the opinion of the Chinese community” (4). More importantly, the establishment of these charitable organizations makes it possible for “Chinese merchants to enhance, protect, and perpetuate their social and political status in a colony where traditional mechanism did not exist” (Carroll 72). In other words, these institutions do not necessarily reflect the benevolence of the colonial government, but they do represent the voice of the Chinese elites (most of whom are Eurasians) in Hong Kong, who are among the first to claim a Hong Kong identity<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> It is generally regarded that Hong Kong identity was not established until the 1970s. Carroll’s case study of Ho Kai (何基) suggests however, that as early as in the 1920s, a sense of Hong Kong identity already existed for Chinese elites in Hong Kong, although this sense of Hong Kong identity was closely connected with their patriotic nationalism during that time. See Carroll, pp149-173.

From this perspective, it is not hard to understand why Suyin applauds the rescue of Oh-no. As a witness and recorder of this incident, Suyin also feels the power to speak for the Chinese people in Hong Kong. Interestingly, despite all the difficulties that Suyin faces in Hong Kong, among which her Eurasian identity and her relationship with Mark are the two most serious ones, she is able to survive and continues her writing. That is to say, even though Suyin's social status faces challenges in Hong Kong, she still enjoys certain freedom and privilege compared to victims such as Oh-no. After all, Suyin is not proletarian even though she claims that she is poor. She never belongs to the underprivileged group regardless of all the prejudices she has to suffer. According to Emma Teng, on December 23, 1929, the most prominent Eurasians in Hong Kong held a meeting to "discuss the establishment of an association to take charge of the welfare needs of Eurasian families in the colony" (222). This association, which is named Welfare League, in Teng's opinion, represents one "strategy for negotiating the paradoxical position of privilege and denigration, inclusion and exclusion, that the Eurasian bourgeoisie occupied in prewar Hong Kong" (224). In a similar way, Han's literary creation also represents her negotiation of her dilemmatic position in Hong Kong. Economically speaking, Han does not belong to the bourgeoisie class in Hong Kong. While the businessmen had to rely on their economic power to gain some recognition from both the British and Chinese communities, writing is Han's tool to negotiate her hybrid identity in Hong Kong. In order to justify her abandoning of her full Chineseness,

she uses humanism as a perfect excuse. In the novel, Suyin's love towards Mark is out of human nature. Her appreciation of the colonial government is also because of some of their humane policies. But is "humanism" able to make sure everyone stand equal under heaven in Hong Kong?

Overall, we should not overlook Suyin's elite social class. There is a chance that her love with Mark probably would become another "Suzie Wong" story had her belonged to the lowest social stratum. For the great many poor people who scatter in the outlying districts, race is not the main reason that separates them from those who live on the Peak. As Burton argues, "socio-cultural distance was maintained not necessarily due to the racial factor, but more on account of the preoccupation by the British towards the concept of class" (48). At the end of the novel, when Suyin loses her job at the hospital because of her scandal with Mark, she has to find another job so that she can survive and continue writing this autobiographical fiction. But for those people, especially the refugees from China, who do not possess any language skill, who do not have decent education, or those who do not even have a healthy body, finding a job is impossible. While the British colony accepted these refugees, it did not provide them means to survive. Han's wish for equality did not come true in 1950s Hong Kong because she did not understand people who live in the bottom of the pyramid of the society. There is no place for the refugees in Hong Kong but they are striving to find their niche in the world, in Hong Kong, even if they have to sacrifice their life. An examination of Hong Kong's locality have to take

account into this special group of people, who occupied a great proportion of Hong Kong population in the 1950s and who continued to transform the Hong Kong society. In the next chapter, I will analyze how these lower-class people survive—or fail to survive in 1950s Hong Kong.

## CHAPTER 3

### HONG KONG DREAM OR LEFTISM

#### THE PROBLEM OF REFUGEES IN *POVERTY-STRICKEN ALLEY*

Hong Kong after WWII was full of refugees. According to Chi-Kwan Mark's 2007 article "The 'Problem of People,'" the Japanese invasion and occupation of Hong Kong "significantly transformed the demography of Hong Kong" (2). Many people chose to return to their native lands, mostly in Guangdong. It is after the defeat of Japan that Hong Kong "once again became a place for Chinese migration from the mainland, now engulfed in a civil war" (2). The Hong Kong government addressed this particular issue in its annual report as "a problem of people."<sup>42</sup> Mark argues that the great number of immigrants from China had caused great pressure for the colonial government, especially on "finance, housing, education, medical services, social welfare, industry, commerce and even political relations and the law" (2). Han Suyin's vignettes about various refugees from China reflect these pressures in one way or another. In Han Suyin's mind, the colonial government actively participated in their humanistic support for these refugees.

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<sup>42</sup> This term first appeared in Governor Grantham's report. See Mark, 2007.

According to Mark, however, the colonial government took a non-interventional approach towards the refugee problem. “Although most of the refugees were accepted on humanitarian grounds, Grantham (then the governor of Hong Kong) strongly opposed provision of large-scale relief measures, lest it would encourage more refugees to come and the existing ones to stay” (5). Underlying Grantham’s refusal to provide any long-term support to these refugees was his belief that these refugees were not his “own people but the efflux of a neighbouring country and thus they should not be singled out for special relief measures at the expense of the rest of the population” (Mark, “The Problem” 7). Grantham did not explicitly explain the rationale of classifying people in Hong Kong. At least, there are three groups in his classification, his “own people” which obviously include only British, the refugees, and the “rest of the population” in Hong Kong, among which a great majority are Chinese. His exclusion of the refugees from the British and Chinese population in Hong Kong thus indicates that in his sorting, he took into consideration not only racial but also economic and political factors. In other words, regardless of the fact that most refugees and early settlers in Hong Kong are both ethnically Chinese, their political and economic status vary greatly. The question is then, what are some of the criteria that separate them from the rest of the Chinese population?

Sir Mark Young, the preceding Governor of Hong Kong advocated for a collaborative partnership between the colonial government and the local Chinese



community<sup>43</sup>. But his tenure ended shortly and his successor Alexander Grantham took a different approach. Grantham believed that the Chinese community would never be loyal to the British Empire because “the cultural affinity of the Chinese were too strong and Hong Kong too close to China for the majority of the local Chinese to develop local loyalty to the colony” (Tsang 148). In other words, Grantham does not even believe the possibility of a Hong Kong identity. Rather, he considers that the shared Chinese ethnicity and culture together create a unified Chinese identity for Chinese people in Hong Kong. Grantham’s classification of “us” and “others” merely based on their ethnicity of course is oversimplified and he overlooks the complexity of Chineseness among the Chinese community. As Han Suyin shows in her novel, her once affirmed Chinese identity experiences continuous challenges and revisions during her sojourn in Hong Kong. Unlike Grantham who sees Chinese identity as a unified entity, Han Suyin considers that in Hong Kong many refugees call into question their Chineseness. On the other hand, Grantham also acknowledges that there are different classes among the Chinese population in Hong Kong. His division between the refugees and the local Chinese population in Hong Kong reveals his emphasis on the economic status for

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<sup>43</sup> According to Steve Tsang, Young took office in 1946, after Japan surrendered and left Hong Kong. To restore the lost credibility of the colonial government during the Japanese occupation, Young initiated economic and political reforms. His purpose was to invite more Chinese representatives in administrative management of Hong Kong. He wanted to create a “form of diarchy, or parallel government” that could “forge partnership between the colonial government and the local Chinese community” (145-147).

anyone who possesses a sense of belonging in Hong Kong. His perception again conflicts with Han Suyin's who considers that the awareness of one's agency<sup>44</sup> is especially noticeable in people who used to belong to very low social status back in mainland China. Their newly-found agency also makes it possible for them to join the Chinese community in Hong Kong. My question is, what guarantees the refugees the opportunity to gain a new agency, economic success, humanistic care, or something else?

Before answering this question, I would like to return to the case of Oh-no that I mentioned in the previous chapter. She seems to be a perfect example of someone who successfully climbs up the social ladder—from a *mui tsai*, a bound slave, to an independent skilled worker after being trained in PLK. It is probably reasonable to assume that Oh-no is on her way to become a new Hong Kong citizen. Without any doubt, compared to China, which was then overwhelmed by the Civil War, the British colonial government<sup>45</sup> provided more welfare to those who were bullied and abused in families, some of which still maintained traditional patriarchal power structures.

Although the salvation of Oh-no is the result of a coincidental misunderstanding, Oh-no

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<sup>44</sup> I would say Han Suyin's definition of agency is largely from a humanistic perspective rather than a cultural perspective. At least, she considers that low-class people, especially servants, refugees, or even prostitutes can live a more decent and humane life in Hong Kong.

<sup>45</sup> I argued in Chapter Two that it was mainly the responsibility of Chinese merchants to supervise PLK, but the permission to establish it at the first place certainly was a decision made by the colonial government. On a very small scale, especially in terms of social welfare, the Chinese community seemed to have achieved a type of partnership with the colonial government, a representation of collaboration that was advocated by Governor Young.

as an individual does seem to get rid of the status of refugees. This opportunity, however, was not available to every refugee from China. For instance, Suzie Wong's world includes a lot of "fallen women" who probably have suffered similar sexual abuses in their early ages. Why then are they not accepted by the PLK but instead become prostitutes, who remain at the bottom of the society? Of course, I do not mean to say that these fictional characters actually existed and were not saved by the PLK. What I want to argue here is: PLK's salvation of many women and children is more than social welfare. Indeed, the main purpose for PLK was to help those helpless, but the process of accepting these women and children and following treatment of them were highly selective. Second, the establishment of PLK represented one of the many ways in which the Chinese community uttered its own voices and constructed a new identity in Hong Kong. The fact that some of the victims were excluded from the outlook of the PLK revealed that the voices of many others—most of whom belonged to the lower class—were still neglected. These people did not belong to the elite class but they occupied a great proportion of the Chinese population in Hong Kong. To have a more comprehensive understanding of postwar Hong Kong society, it is necessary to look at how these neglected people tried to find their place in Hong Kong after WWII.

Angelina Chin argues that until 1937, the PLK was "an institution used by urban elites...to define Hong Kong's identity by forcing women deemed incorrigible, prostitutes with diseases, and the sick to return to their 'homeland' (xiang) in China"

(135-6). In her Foucaultian analysis of the function of PLK, she contends that we should understand the PLK in the context of “social control” both as “a reform and correctional house” and “an asylum to separate the ‘insane’ or ‘diseased’ from healthy citizens” (137). Although Chin’s work concentrates on the period before WWII, her arguments are applicable to the postwar period. At least, the major aim for PLK was still “the protection of virtue” and Oh-no and many other “inmates” of the PLK “learn sewing, handicraft, a little reading and writing” (Han 192). Oh-no, with her “courage” to report the crimes of her masters, is certainly deemed as one that is correctible. For women like Suzie Wong who is willing to be prostitutes—even though her main purpose is to support her family, they would either be ignored by the PLK or receive a total different treatment. The different fates of these fictional characters also testify what Chin argues as “a hierarchy of tolerance” (142). Chin points out that the inmates of the PLK can be divided into at least three levels: children who were adopted by good families and thus would enter a re-classification of social status, *mui tsai* who could return to the society after willingly learning new skills, and finally prostitutes who were separated and not provided training at all (142). Worse than that, most of these women who were separated ended up being deported back to China and Chin sees this transition from separation to deportation a reflection of “public anxiety over the increase of poor, uneducated women in the city” because it is also during this crucial moment that the Chinese social elites were trying to constructing “urban citizenship” (146). Among this classification of these inmates, there

are three interrelated factors: gender, moral judgment, and economic status. Many of the boys were adopted into well-off families as to “inherit property” while the girls learned new skills so that they would be able to earn a living when they grew up (Chin 140). The skills that they learned would make sure that they preserve their virtue and chastity and have an economic basis. Otherwise, they had to return to mainland China, their *xiang*, or original place.

Acknowledging that China was their hometown, these elites—who made the decision whether certain people were qualified as Hong Kong citizens—did not deny their own Chinese identity. Most often, they had their dual worlds like Han Suyin does. Meanwhile, by cutting a clear boundary between certain groups of people, these elites were also fostering an exclusive Hong Kong identity. To these elites, a Hong Kong identity and a Chinese identity are not necessarily mutually exclusive. But one does not directly translate into the other. In other words, being a Chinese in Hong Kong does not mean that they have a Hong Kong identity. At least in postwar Hong Kong, the awareness of a Hong Kong identity for most people required three prerequisites: the possibility to permanently settle down in Hong Kong, stable economic improvement, and finally a sense of citizenship after solving housing and economic problems. The importance of economic success echoed Grantham’s policies, which shifted away from Young’s political reform and focused more on rehabilitating Hong Kong’s economy. Therefore, in postwar Hong Kong, the local Chinese were “increasingly preoccupied with matters of

livelihood” (Tsang 148) and this preoccupation with economic development indeed contributed to the construction and development of a Hong Kong citizenship.

Not everyone fit into this blueprint. There were always deviants like those who were deemed uncorrectable by the PLK. To people who failed to make any economic improvement, or those who were considered “immoral,” how did they see their own position in the society that they could not fit? Being poor and “immoral,” what made it possible for them to survive in Hong Kong and did they succeed anyways? After the 1960s, the economy of Hong Kong took off and the emphasis on economic striving became the mainstream spirit. Tycoons such as Li Ka-shing (李嘉誠), who arose from a nobody to the richest man in Hong Kong, became the legendary role model for Hong Kong people. Around the 1960s, most people believed that hard work could change everything, and that is generally regarded as the Hong Kong Dream.

According to Ching-hua Anita Koo, “the emergence of an optimistic belief of openness and opportunities is the dominant beliefs system foremost among changes since the 60’s” (12). The emergence of this “dominant ideology (social belief)” of openness and opportunities, in Koo’s argument, is related to two factors (12). On the one hand, she argues that “the Hong Kong government and the ideology behind various social policies in different social time contexts take an active role to shape the belief system, social ethos and values among the general public in Hong Kong” (4-5). On the other hand, the dominant social belief is “enhanced by the individuals’ real experience, such as upward

mobility, general increase in living standards” (Koo 2). The emergence of Hong Kong Dream is certainly inseparable from economic progress and social mobility. Before the 1960s, when the economic situation in Hong Kong did not foresee the possibility of a Hong Kong Dream, there were people who failed to achieve economic success. Do our presumption of the current Hong Kong identity and Hong Kong Dream affect our interpretation of those failures? In other words, is it possible that because these people fail to secure their economic status, they seem to contemporary Hongkongers as deviants? Likewise, is it possible that writings about these unsuccessful deviants also receive inadequate analysis because they fail to fit into our imagination of a developing Hong Kong?

This chapter examines Lü Lun’s 1952 novel *Poverty-Stricken Alley*<sup>46</sup> (*Qiongxiang* 穷巷). As the title of this novel indicates, it is about poverty and misfortune. At the first glance, this novel seems to tell the stories of those people who failed to secure their Hong Kong identity through economic improvement. A close examination of it, however, reveals a different way in which poor people try to find their place in postwar Hong Kong in later 1940s and early 1950s. Lü Lun sees a different possibility of a Hong Kong Dream that does not seem to entail economic success. Is this difference the reason that this novel has been understudied in Hong Kong literary history even though Lü Lun himself was a comparatively well-known author?

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<sup>46</sup> All translations of this novel are mine.

I will investigate these questions in this chapter in two parts. In the first part I will do a textual analysis of *Poverty-Stricken Alley*. Analyzing the contrast between the failure of the protagonists to escape from poverty and the general trend of the Hong Kong society to make economic progress, I focus on how these poor people view themselves in Hong Kong. The reasons why the five protagonists in the novel suffer poverty are manifold: their refugee status affects the chances for them to find well-paid jobs. More importantly, their failure to earn money also illustrates the complicity between morality and economic success. They are either considered as “immoral” because of certain mistakes/crimes that they are forced to commit; or they have their own moral judgments and they would not sacrifice their version of “morality” for the sake of money. They are content to live in poverty and survive the harsh life through “spiritual victory.” This term is probably best known in Lu Xun’s *The True Story of Ah-Q*. Lu Xun is highly sarcastic of the mentality of Chinese people, and in the novel, the protagonist Ah-Q best represents this mentality. Denotations of such a “spiritual victory” 精神勝利法 include self-deception, self-comforting, self-talk when faced with extreme defeat or humiliation. While Ah Q surrenders to the hierarchical system and people who are above him, he persuades himself that he is spiritually “superior” to his oppressors. My usage of this term to describe the spirits of protagonists in the *Poverty-Stricken Alley* however, is not sarcastic. What I mean “spirit” is more likely a will and belief that is shared by the major characters in the novel. Their belief that something positive will eventually happen is the



core ethos of the Hong Kong Dream. They believe that as long as the poor people unite and encourage each other, they will have a better future. By the end of the novel, these characters have not achieved any economic success, but their hope for a better future continues. I contend that the optimism displayed in this novel does not depart from the well-recognized Hong Kong Dream, which also emphasizes openness and opportunities. But why do most critics fail to give credit to Lü Lun, whose imagination of a Hong Kong Dream is not antagonistic to the one that we now recognize?

I examine the historical reasons for the insufficient attention to this novel in the second part of this chapter. Lü Lun's emphasis on the unification of the poor deviates from the economic prosperity in Hong Kong. Instead of expecting a change of their economic status, the protagonists persuade themselves to live with poverty. As a result, the optimistic spirit in the novel is seldom associated with the Hong Kong Dream. On the contrary, Lü Lun's emphasis on the poor class is interpreted in a highly political way. According to Huang Zhongming<sup>47</sup>, Lü Lun in the majority of his life suffered poverty and thus his writing was sympathetic to Communism. Leftist writers treated him as a comrade but he faced hostility from the Rightists (iv). *Poverty-Stricken Alley* was first serialized on Huashang Bao (華商報) in 1948, whose chief editors included Xia Yan, a renowned communist writer, and later a Communist official for The People's Republic of China. In Huang's opinion, Lü Lun's writing itself is not leftist regardless of his understanding and

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<sup>47</sup> Secondary sources written originally in Chinese are translated by me.

sympathy for communism. Lü Lun did not consider himself a communist, either.

According to Huang, Lü Lun composed two poems on a “most unpleasant New Year’s Eve” when he was “mistakenly labeled as a Leftist and a Communist” (vii). His commitment to writing serious literature about Hong Kong from the perspective of a “Chinese” however, was too risky especially during the Cold War period. Lü Lun recalled that:

When *Poverty-Stricken Alley* is about to finish, the manager of the publishing house came to discuss about the ending of this novel, for fear that I would add a “horrible” tail. In addition, the title of this novel contains ‘poverty’ which might catch attention from certain people with ‘sensitivity.’ In case that the book might be banned in some overseas regions, the novel has an alternative title *Metropolitan Song* (都市曲). (qtd in Huang ii)

Lü Lun’s fear that this novel might be mistaken as communist propaganda is reasonable. In fact, Lü Lun is generally considered as one of the prominent leftist writers. In Zhang Yongmei’s book *Margin and Center: A Discussion of Hong Kong in Hong Kong Leftist Writings, 1950-1967*, Lü Lun’s name is listed after Xia Yi, Shu Xiangcheng and Ruan Lang, who openly alleged their Leftist stance (21). Overall, these leftist writers have long been neglected because their depictions of Hong Kong as a corrupted capitalist society do not look familiar to contemporary readers who are used to enjoying Hong

Kong's economic prosperity. But maybe as early as the 1970s these authors had already begun to lose popularity as a result of multiple leftist movements. I will focus on one most important movement, the 1967 riots and analyzes its impact on the acceptance of novels, which since then have been (mis)interpreted as leftist novels. After the 1967 riots, communism lost popularity among the Hong Kong masses and the development of leftist writing was halted. The result is that most writers and writings that are labelled as leftist are too easily disregarded. Zhang's book is the first to offer a systematic analysis of the history of Hong Kong leftist writings. But even in her book, she does not spend too much time on Lü Lun other than briefly listing him as one of the leftist writers. Lü Lun never openly called himself a leftist and his political ambivalence partially explains why he is not welcomed by the rightists but is equally under-examined among the leftists. In my opinion, however, the value of his writing lies exactly in such ambivalence. To Lü Lun, it is political ambivalence together with optimism that support early refugees to survive in Hong Kong. Even though Lü Lun does not emphasize the importance of economic developments in Hong Kong—history has shown that it was the pivotal force for the underprivileged groups to find their own place in Hong Kong—his uncertainty about the political future in Hong Kong reflects the power struggles during the Cold War period. And his hope for the Hong Kong society in the 1950s, like the optimistic characters in *Poverty-Stricken Alley*, lays the foundation of the Hong Kong Dream, which is going to further develop after the 1960s.

## **A Realistic Novel about Postwar Hong Kong**

The story of *Poverty-Stricken Alley* takes place in 1946 and centers around four tenants who share a room in a shabby building in Kowloon. They are Mo Lun, who has relatives in Hong Kong and has settled down in Hong Kong for many years. During the Japanese occupation, he was tortured by a “traitor” called Wang Daniu and was physically disabled. He now works as a rag man. The other three include Du Quan, Luo Jian, and Gao Huai. Du Quan is a friend of Mo Lun back in China. As a veteran, Du Quan wants to try his luck in Hong Kong but has failed to find any jobs. Luo Jian is a middle school teacher, with heavy daily duties but low income. Gao Huai was a war correspondent and comes to Hong Kong to take a break in order to finish his novel. He works as a writer/translator for a newspaper, but his writing is not well received and thus his income is scarce. Each of these four characters has bits and pieces that resemble Lü Lun’s own life experiences. Like Mo Lun, Lü Lun is very familiar with Hong Kong and he has spent all his life but five years in Hong Kong. In 1927, Lü Lun joined the Northern Expedition 北伐 and therefore he is also a veteran. Another time when Lü Lun left Hong Kong was during the Japanese occupation. For four years, Lü Lun worked in mainland China as a middle school teacher, just like Luo Jian. But the character with whom Lü Lun probably identifies is Gao Huai. Due to poverty, Gao Huai’s literary pursuits are constantly interrupted. Lü Lun also faced great challenges in his literary career. Although he started writing at the age of seventeen, he did not publish his first novel *Poverty-*

*Stricken Alley* until his forties. And it took him five years to finish this medium-length novel. He attributes his slow writing process to poverty: “this was entirely because my life was unstable, which prevented me from finishing it at all once” (3). Also similar to Gao Huai, who insists on writing serious novels, Lü Lun has also tried to depict a realistic Hong Kong in his writing.

There are several important changes in Lü Lun’s literary career in terms of the subject matter of his novels and his writing style. His earlier works focused on metropolitan love stories and caught attention of the Ye Lingfeng<sup>48</sup> 葉靈鳳. But according to Yuan Liangjun, there are major differences between these two authors even within similar themes. While Ye focuses more on upper classes, Lü has always been interested in the lower classes (118). Nevertheless, Lü Lun’s writing did not convey any explicit message of class struggles until the breakout of the Sino-Japanese War. From then on, Lü Lun’s writing shifted to anti-Fascist and anti-oppression themes. *Poverty-Stricken Alley*, especially, focuses on social problems for refugees in postwar Hong Kong. Luo Fu argues that this turning point has inestimable significance to Lü Lun. Luo Fu contends that “Lü Lun’s love stories cannot be compared to *Poverty-Stricken Alley*. The

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<sup>48</sup> Ye belongs to the Shanghai-style writers 海派作家 even though his literary career in Shanghai ended in 1938 when he moved to Hong Kong. He worked as a newspaper editor in Hong Kong, and continued writing non-fictions. His earlier writings adopt psychological analysis and modernist techniques. His novels about Shanghai often include exotic depictions of foreign elements. Lü Lun’s early writing about Hong Kong has been influenced by Ye’s style.

former do not go deep into humanity 人性. Only *Poverty-Stricken Alley* depicts the real Hong Kong, a Hong Kong after WWII. Without this novel, Lü Lun could not have been a real Hong Kong writer, or at least a less successful one” (7). Luo Fu further compares *Poverty-Stricken Alley* to another famous novel that deals with Hong Kong reality, *The Story of Shrimp Ball* (*Xiaqiu zhuan* 蝦球傳) by Huang Guliu. In Luo Fu’s opinion, most plots in *The Story of Shrimp Ball* take place in Guangzhou instead of Hong Kong. Therefore, *Poverty-Stricken Alley* is the first realistic novel about Hong Kong after WWII.

Luo Fu’s argument is very convincing, and the most realistic part in *Poverty-Stricken Alley* is the discussion of the refugee problem. Lü Lun does a very successful job depicting a Hong Kong from the perspective of Chinese refugees. My adoption of the term “refugee” has more implications in economic terms instead of political terms. The bondage between the four tenants is their shared poverty instead of political belief (In fact, political issues are deemphasized in the novel and not discussed explicitly). Their major difficulties in Hong Kong are also related to their economic status. More specifically, I think Lü Lun correctly points out two challenges faced by refugees from China after WWII: housing and unemployment. After the retreat of Japanese and the breakout of Chinese Civil War, Hong Kong witnessed the greatest wave of migrants from China. At first, the colonial government did not intervene until it became a serious problem in early 1950s. The initial reaction of the Hong Kong government was to “order

the Hong Kong governor to wire the border and forcibly turn back any refugees who tried to cross into British territory” (Peterson 175). For those who had already settled down, the Hong Kong government did not provide adequate housing or other social welfare. How to find a living place and a job to survive then became the top concerns for the majority of refugees. The four characters in *Poverty-Stricken Alley* are no exceptions.

### **It is All about Money**

Postwar Hong Kong faced a lot of economic pressures. According to Tsang, “the thorniest problem in May 1946 remained getting essential supplies, particularly rice and fuel... There were also problems with the high cost of living and a severe shortage of housing” (145). At the beginning of the novel, the four protagonists are troubled by three months’ rent that they owe to the landlady, Tigress Bao Sangu. This uncertainty about where to live has prevailed throughout the novel because more serious consequences might follow if they cannot find a place to live. As Luo Jian says, “In Hong Kong, we would rather lose our dinner instead of our place to live. Otherwise, it would be unimaginable if we were deported as homeless refugees” (Lü 6). With more refugees coming to Hong Kong, it is easy for Tigress to find more tenants than she needs. Therefore, she has constantly threatened to throw the four tenants out if they cannot pay rent in time. In the novel, these tenants try various ways to find enough money to pay off their rents.

Their miserable living conditions deteriorate when Gao Huai, on his way to borrow money, takes back a homeless young woman Bai Mei out of sympathy. Through Bai Mei's eyes, readers get a detailed description of this shabby apartment for the first time. When Bai Mei arrives at the apartment, she notices that "there is no light in the room" because the four tenants cannot even afford electricity (14). Now that Bai Mei agrees to stay, the five of them have to crouch in this apartment which "is just one room. Next to the wall are some beds, two of which have meshes. There is a round table in the center of the room and several chairs. Other than that, there is no furniture. Even the suitcases piled underneath the beds and the closets on the beds are very simple...Because of humidity, the roof has 'scars' everywhere" (15, 18). Gao Huai is very generous to offer Bai Mei his own bed because compared to the beds of his roommates, his has "fewer bed bugs" (16). Because of this new tenant, Du Quan has to sleep on the floor. The room is so crowded that one can barely turn around. Sometimes fights break out due to troubles caused by the limited space. There are occasions when Mo Lun carelessly drops his basin and dampens Du Quan's "bed." There is also an accident that Luo Jian's only robe gets burned because there is not enough space for him to hang it. Enduring these miseries is not the most difficult because at least they have a place to stay. Many people in postwar Hong Kong were houseless. In the end of the novel, Tigress has found someone who can afford the rent and they lost their "apartment."

There are two reasons for the severe housing problem faced by these protagonists.



One obvious one is that they are too poor, and other reason has to do the inefficient social welfare system in postwar Hong Kong. It is not until December 1953 when a squatter fire in Shek Kip Mei broke out, thus propelling “the Hong Kong government to find a lasting solution to the problem of squatters, the majority of whom were refugees” (Mark, “The Problem” 6). Before this fire, “the British government resisted taking serious measures to deal with the refugee problem” (Peterson 175). Most of the time, the government “left housing largely to private enterprises” (Mark, “The Problem” 5). Only a few elites controlled the majority of houses in Hong Kong during that time. Therefore, although Lü Lun’s depiction of the housing situation might be a little exaggerated<sup>49</sup>, refugees back then more or less had similar experiences. A more direct cause for their miserable life is the fact that finding a job in postwar Hong Kong was very difficult. According to Mark, it is not until the end of the 1950s that “Hong Kong’s export-oriented, labour-intensive industrial economy began to take off, providing the government with more financial resources and the population more job opportunities” (29). Before this transformation, Hong Kong’s major economic function was an entrepot between mainland China and the rest of the world. When the Korean War broke out, United Nations enforced trade

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<sup>49</sup> Considering that this novel is supposed to be realistic, it is very unrealistic for Gao Huai to make the decision to take Bai Mei home. First, he does not have the economic capability to accommodate another person. Second, this arrangement totally disrupts social gender norms. Back in 1946, when the novel is set, it would still be a taboo for a single woman to live with a group of strange men. Indeed most people would not accept such an arrangement and that is why Bai Mei has to pretend that she is the younger sister of Gao Huai in order to avoid gossip. Interestingly enough, no one opposes Bai Mei’s stay, not even Du Quan, the one usually depicted as irrational and inconsiderate.

embargoes on China, and Hong Kong entered into a trade recession between 1952 and 1954 (Mark, *Hong Kong* 7). The novel is set in 1946, six years before the recession. But while Lü Lun was writing it in 1952, he was indeed suffering from the consequences of the economic recession. The tragic ending of this novel, more or less reflects Lü Lun's concern about the economic situation in Hong Kong at that time.

Aside from these external reasons, these protagonists have difficulties earning money because their value system is totally against the dominant ideology. Hong Kong might have many opportunities for one to make a fortune, and many of these five protagonists came to Hong Kong with this belief to try their luck. Luo Jian and Du Quan come to Hong Kong with the hope to find a decent job only to realize that they do not "have any luck even in Hong Kong" (7). Bai Mei is also told that "there are many jobs for women in Hong Kong and it is easy to find a job" (182). When she comes to Hong Kong, she finds that the easy job is to become a prostitute. But these people, especially Gao Huai and Bai Mei, have their own moral standards, and would not trade their pride for money. According to Gao Huai, Hong Kong is a vulgar society that concentrates on materialistic and economic concerns. Mo Lun once asks Gao Huai why he does not write popular fictions. He tells Gao Huai "If you write pornographic novels that never end, you will gain both fame and wealth. As long as you are willing to cater to the lowest tastes, and care about nothing, you will be successful. Not only will the publishing houses invite you to publish books, the film companies will also buy copyrights from you. At that time,

do you still need to endure the Tigress?” (93). Gao Huai’s answer is that these writers who earn fame and wealth by writing pornographic novels do not even know what they are writing about. They are simply creating literary trash that pollutes the whole society, deteriorating the already “backward 落後 society and masses” (93). In Gao Huai’s mind, Hong Kong culture is not for one with reasonable mind to understand (93-94). Since he does not understand it, the only thing he can do is insisting on his literary pursuit and refusing to serve the morbid society or satisfy the low cultural tastes.

Bai Mei’s choice is somewhat similar. Although she is cheated by Wang Daniu’s wife and becomes one of her many victims, she does not want to surrender. Of course, she could make some money if she is willing to continue this profession (remember that Suzie Wong’s economic situation was even better than Robert’s before he became famous). It is therefore reasonable to assume that Bai Mei has the potential to become a successful prostitute and make a great fortune. But she despises herself and decides to end her life before Gao Huai saves her. After hearing her past experiences, Gao Huai ascribes her misfortune to the society, which he blames for forcing Bai Mei to sell her body for money. According to Gao Huai, “human beings should be ready for the hard circumstances and misunderstandings from the vulgar society. Otherwise, we can barely survive, not to mention to strive for a better future” (236). These two similarly maintain a moral bottom line and stay away from the materialized society, whose concern is solely

on making money<sup>50</sup>, even if that means they have to suffer from poverty. Their similar moral beliefs naturally draw them to each other, and it is not surprising that the two fall in love.

Poverty also drives Du Quan to commit suicide. Du Quan decides to end his life because he finds no hope to find a job after three months' imprisonment, which means that it is impossible for him to satisfy his superficial lover Ah Zhen and her snobbish mother Wu Gu, who is a cigarette hawker caring only about gaining petty advantages. She has two demands for Du Quan before he can date Ah Zhen. The first is to fix an old unrepairable clock, which "is passed down from Ah Zhen's father" (44). While Du Quan knows nothing about clock fixing, he also does not have enough money to buy another new clock. Ah Zhen comes up with another idea to please her mother—to buy a water pipe for her, ideally one "coated with brass and with certain delicacy" (91). Buying a water pipe is impossible for Du Quan, who "has only two dollars, far from enough to buy a water pipe. He felt pain and could only buy alcohol with the two dollar" (128). The turning point is that Mo Lun collects a water pipe, and gives it to Du Quan, without realizing that it was stolen. Because of Du Quan's possession of this water pipe, he is imprisoned and eventually decides to end his life. The direct cause of Du Quan's death,

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<sup>50</sup> Lü Lun also intentionally designs the names for these two characters. Gao Huai (高懷) introduces his name as "with great ambition, but cannot put his talents to work" (志向高遠，懷才不遇). Bai Mei (白玫), likewise, also emphasizes her chastity and perseverance (清白的白，玫瑰的玫).

according to Gao Huai, is that he unfortunately meets two “vulgar women” who have “utilitarian thought, feudalistic mind, and superficial belief” (39). A more deep-seated reason leading to the death of Du Quan is the hostile environment for refugees in postwar Hong Kong. As Gao Huai concludes, “life is a battle. If one cannot beat himself, he cannot beat life. Du Quan could not get over the hardships but was crushed. He lost the battle against himself and he lost the courage to fight against life” (255). Du Quan does not believe in social mobility because he cannot find a way out of poverty. Since he cannot live with his refugee status, suicide is his only choice.

### **An Early Version of the Hong Kong Dream**

It is poverty that connects the four male tenants. Beyond similar economic conditions, these four also shared a similar belief. Most of them are optimistic of making a change of their lives in Hong Kong. It is this spiritual victory that makes it possible for them to overcome economic hardships. It is indeed out of this motivation that Lü Lun decides to write this story. Instead of merely revealing the evilness in the society, Lü Lun wishes to spread this optimism to his fellow readers. In the foreword to the new edition of this novel, Lü Lun recalls when this novel was first published in 1952, he received letters from some readers, who told him that “they like this novel because they can sympathize with the protagonists. They have similar experiences but now they have overcome those difficulties” (4). Writing a novel about the people living at the bottom of the society,

therefore, would allow their voices to be heard, thus encouraging them to keep on fighting for a better future since they are never alone. The five tenants often encourage each other when they face financial difficulties because “life is hard. But who knows how many people in the society are living a similar life? From that perspective, our hardship is not that special” (51). A line that appears repetitively in the novel is that “we have a future” (我們是有前途的). Although they might not be sure where the future lies exactly, they do not part with despair but with hope. Even Du Quan who decides to die leaves his final words: “Friends, we have a future but I cannot live anymore. Forgive me” (254).

Maintaining this hope allows the poor people to have the courage to live and to wish something better will happen in the next day. The four tenants all have their dreams respectively. Mo Lun wants to revenge the traitor Wang Daniu who broke his leg, and he successfully finds him among tons of people and puts him into prison. Luo Jian wants to earn money to support his family back in China. His dream does not come true but he knows that he does not have to worry about his son, who had joined the Communist army and would soon have a new regime to back him up. Gao Huai is also confident that he will be able to publish his book one day somewhere. All these hopes keep them from surrendering to the hard life. Otherwise, “life is still like dead water. Today is like yesterday and tomorrow will be another same day” (148). However, if one believes that tomorrow will be a different day, then one will remain positive instead of being disappointed at life. The last scene in the novel takes place in the train station. Bai Mei

dares not ask Gao Huai where they are going, but Gao Huai assures her that “after the nightmare, we will awake with a bright new day;” “Do not look back. Focus on the road underneath;” “Follow me and move forward. You forget what I said? We have a future” (262). This vague yet positive ending plays down the tragic death of Du Quan and instills the abject people and society with the optimism to continue their life in Hong Kong and elsewhere.

The protagonists’ belief that there is a future for them represents the social belief in openness and opportunities, which as I argued earlier, was the dominant ideology in Hong Kong starting from 1960s. Openness in this context means a possibility of social mobility and it is closely related to opportunities one has to change one’s economic status. According to Koo, large-scale surveys have shown that since 1960s, and especially during the decade from 1976 to 1986, “large amounts of settled population and its offsprings took over economic opportunities and experienced upward social mobility in terms of their income and status” (11). Accompanying economic development, the colonial government also actively revised their housing policies since the 1970s. Koo points out that since 1971, “an increase in both the quantity and quality of public housing became the dominant trend of housing policy” (32). Due to governmental intervention in housing policies, aspirations for better living environment was possible<sup>51</sup>. Housing

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<sup>51</sup> To discuss specific changes in Hong Kong’s public housing policies, see Koo, pp. 30-40.

improvement and economic opportunities together produced an optimistic belief among the public that class boundaries were not insurmountable. As Li Xiyuan argues, after 1960s, with the development of local economy, class structures in Hong Kong also began to transform. Many people who were born as lower classes were able to join the middle class through their efforts. It became a dominant belief that as long as one strived, they would be successful someday (Li 39), and this belief is generally considered as the “Hong Kong Dream” (Li 39). As early as the 1970s, Sam Hsu’s comedies and later Stephen Chow’s movies in the 1990s all highlight this “Hong Kong Dream.” Miracles would happen to a “nobody,” who through his/her own efforts would be able to create one’s world. While watching these films, audiences today, especially the generations after WWII grew up, are likely to agree that these films by Sam Hsu and Stephen Chow represent the real Hong Kong.

Judging from this perspective, Lü Lun’s emphasis on the belief of a bright future can be regarded as an early model of the Hong Kong Dream that dominated the society from the 1960s to 1990s. Difference between these two beliefs lies in the fact that Lü Lun emphasizes the optimism purely as a belief without specific measurements to find their future. Lü Lun is quite skeptical of the possibility of crossing class boundaries through economic success, which makes it possible to change one’s social class (This also explains why the future imagined in the novel remains vague). There are a couple of reasons for his criticism on the society’s emphasis on economic development. The most



noticeable one is that in 1950s, the time when Lü Lun started writing this novel, housing problem was still a serious social issue and Hong Kong's economy was yet to take off. Therefore, it is hard for Lü Lun to foresee a possible change of social structure. What he sees is a clear distinction of different classes. In my opinion, his view on class mobility is formed under specific historical contexts, but also has its limits. The biggest problem is Lü Lun's polarized division between different social classes.

Lü Lun's attitude towards different social classes is very manifest and he cuts a clear boundary between the rich and the poor. It seems that all the rich people are evil and indifferent and their wealth is gained through exploitation of the poor people. They are thus the natural enemies of the poor people, who are born to be united as families and comrades. The rich and evil people in this novel include the Tigress, Wang Daniu and his wife, and Bai Mei's sister, who after marrying a rich KMT official, abandons Bai Mei completely. The poor people, on the other hand, care for each other, and this ability to love the equally poor is their instinct. These two worlds are incompatible. The first night when Gao Huai finds Bai Mei, she just runs away from the brothel and wears a modern costume. Based on her appearance, the four men conclude that she is a rich woman, who "is from a different world, one that is totally different from theirs" (33). When Bai Mei later reveals that she actually has no home and no family, the men immediately change their attitudes and consider her to be one of them.

This dramatic change again displays Lü Lun's oversimplification of class division.

The logic is that as long as people are poor, they will be sympathetic to each other. Bai Mei comments that, “if you were rich people, you would not sympathize with me, right?” (35). But since all of them are poor, their care for each other is so natural. Bai Mei feels that “she has never met such friends in her entire life, not to mention that they were strangers. She has never encountered a similar situation where others display passion, and hospitality towards her. Among these poor tenants exist only “sympathy and intimacy, care and mutual help, but not hypocrisy or snobbery” (37, 54). Being poor means that they have to rely more on each other to help everyone get out of the current situation. This willingness to sacrifice for one’s comrades explains why all the four men are willing to let Bai Mei stay even when they are facing numerous problems. Gao Huai’s answer is that since they cannot manage their life anyways, “having one more person does not matter that much. At most, it means that each of [them] eat less. What does that matter?” (33). Bai Mei displays similar willingness to help the even poorer when a newspaper boy asks for help. Bai Mei and Du Quan would use the money to fix the clock but they find it more important to help their poor comrades. Without any hesitation they give the money to the boy, who otherwise will have to suffer hunger the next day. Du Quan’s tragedy is also partially the result of his sacrifice for his friend. The water pipe Du Quan gives to Wu Gu happens to belong to Wang Daniu’s wife, who promises not to sue him as long as Mo Lun abandons charges against Wang Daniu. Du Quan knows that revenging Wang Daniu is Mo Lun’s life-long hope and therefore he voluntarily admits the crime that he

does not commit. After this incident, Du Quan loses his job but his friends are very proud of him because he sacrifices himself for friends (236).

Being poor also means that they have to be united to fight against the rich. Only when they unite and help each other could they survive because the rich would never care about their life or death. In situations when conflicts happen between the tenants, Gao Huai is always there to urge them to make a compromise. “Under such difficult circumstance, we should care about each other. But you are creating excuses to split our group. Isn’t that a joke? ... It is a fact that we are poor, but we can survive by relying on each other. If we are split, then every one of us is doomed” (66-67). The rich people are described as their enemies. In this world, only rich people would despise poor people. Poor people on the other hand, will be united to fight against their enemies. The chapter, which depicts their dealing with the landlady Tigress is entitled “cooperate to fight against the enemy (合作應敵)” (26). Obviously, landlords are the biggest enemies of the poor people because it is these people that cause the high cost of housing in Hong Kong. Gao Huai argues that “most of those tycoons come to Hong Kong with gold bars and become landlords. It is those people who make the land in Hong Kong so expensive” (193).

Lü Lun’s depiction of the underprivileged class is very vivid, and his envisioning of a shared belief among poor people, in my mind, is an earlier model for the Hong Kong Dream. However, *Poverty-Stricken Alley* receives very little attention both from literary

critics and the general readers. The reasons are complicated. The main problem is that Lü Lun's division of social classes in postwar Hong Kong is essentialistic. The society seems to contain only two opposite classes: the poor and the rich. The poor are oppressed while the rich are the oppressors. The poor are morally sublime but it is the morally corrupted who make great fortune. At the very beginning, the omnipotent narrator shows his disappointment at the postwar Hong Kong society. "Hong Kong, quickly restores its prosperity, as well as its ugliness... Those who devoted heart and soul during the war lost everything, and they have always been penniless" (2). The only way to fight against the rich lies in the unity of all the poor people. By dividing the society into two antagonistic classes, Lü Lun simplifies the complicated class structures of Hong Kong at that time. Meanwhile, the plain writing style looks outdated and reminds readers of many Hong Kong leftist novels, which "inherit the tradition of socialist realism. Without any fancy writing styles, leftist writers in a plain way, directly reveal the social problems in the capitalistic system in Hong Kong" (Zhang 19). Whether or not this novel is a socialist realist novel is debatable but overall this style is not very appealing to Hong Kong readers<sup>52</sup>. Both the content and the style of the novel cause suspicion that this novel is a

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<sup>52</sup> Socialist realism is a literary trend that started in the Soviet Union. The term was not coined until 1932 but debates about this unique literary form began in mid-1950s. According to Gary Saul Morson, reasons why socialist realism is not popular among Western readers are complicated. The major one is that in socialist realist novels, "the aesthetic function is not the dominant" while "in the art with which [the Western readers] are most familiar, the aesthetic function is the dominant" (126). Whether Hong Kong can be counted as "West" is debatable from a cultural and literary perspective, but definitely, the six features that summarized by Morson (121-122) especially the inclusion of

leftist novel, a mere communist propaganda. After the 1967 riots, communism including writings that contain communist messages lost favor among Hong Kong people. This political incident influenced the reception of many leftist novels including *Poverty-Stricken Alley*. My question is, do we do justice to Lü Lun by labelling this novel as a leftist novel? In the next part of this chapter, I will look at the extent to which this novel resembles a stereotypical leftist novel in Hong Kong. I will also investigate the changing political climates in Hong Kong during the 1960s and how these changes have influenced the reception of *Poverty-Stricken Alley*.

### **A Leftist Novel?**

Leftist intellectuals played a significant role in the literary development in Hong Kong during the Sino-Japanese War. To escape warfare, many writers, a great many of whom were leftists, settled down in Hong Kong to continue their writing during that time. Mao Dun, Xiao Hong, Sima Changfeng and many others have published important works during their stay in Hong Kong. These writers fostered the literary development and dominated the literary circle in Hong Kong, and after 1949, most of these leftist intellectuals returned to the PRC. Meanwhile, many intellectuals who were suspicious of the new communist regime came to settle in Hong Kong. During the Cold War period,

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political sermons and uncommon themes that are related to socialist construction, are very strange to readers outside a communist regime. For more information about socialist realism, see Ann Demaitre and Sylvia Chan.

because of the critical geographical location of Hong Kong, the United States financially supported the rightist intellectual movements, forming what was known as “Green Back Culture” (美元(援)文化). Therefore, the prosperity of leftist literary activities in the late 1940s experienced a temporal pause. Leftist writers never stopped writing but continued their activities in more unpublicized ways (Zhang 16).

In Zhang Yongmei’s classification, leftist writers include those who openly acknowledge their political stance, those who publish their writings in leftist newspapers—the most famous two are *Ta Kong Pao* (大公報) and *Wenhui Bao* (文匯報), as well as those who depict leftist themes in their writings. In Zhang’s classification, Lü Lun belongs to both the second and the third categories. Although he does not consider himself a leftist writer, his works since the 1940s were serialized in leftist newspapers. In addition, Lü Lun’s writings, especially those after the 1940s, have leftist implications. For instance, Hua Jia, then the editor of *Huangshang Bao*, where *Poverty-Stricken Alley* was serialized, acknowledges Lü Lun’s contribution to leftist literature in a letter: “the fictional characters in your novels have already stepped out of the high-rises and enter the streets. They are no longer young men and women dreaming about love, but nobodies that live under the harsh real life” (62).

Zhang concludes that there are some common features about leftist writings. In terms of their depictions of Hong Kong, most leftist writings focus on class struggles. Leftist writers sympathize with the proletariats and emphasize the importance of union in their

writing. Therefore, most of the protagonists in these writings are the low-class citizens, who are under the oppression of both the colonial government and local capitalists. More specifically, these novels criticize the colonial government for their oppressive and unequal policies such as housing and education. Capitalists are another target for criticism for their exploitation of workers for accumulation of wealth. In most novels, Hong Kong is described to be an evil and wretched place (Zhang 148-180). From a political perspective, the leftist writers see the masses in Hong Kong as politically lagged. Luo Fu, one of the representative leftist writers talked about how the writers tried to separate them from those backward citizens: “citizens who have been long living under colonial rule is backward. Not only backward, but also complicated. Quite a few of them might be enemies and we have to be aware of them” (qtd. in Zhang 69). By describing Hong Kong as an economically oppressive and politically indifferent place, these leftist writings treat mainland China as the only “homeland” and urge underprivileged people living in Hong Kong to return to where they belong. These writers also urge the Hong Kong people to fight against other ideologies. As a result, the leftist writings emphasize how the US forced an embargo on Hong Kong, causing great troubles to people’s life in Hong Kong. The KMT and the rightists in Hong Kong are another group that Hong Kong people should fight against (Zhang 87-121).

Taking consideration of these characteristics, we will find there are similarities and divergences between *Poverty-Stricken Alley* and other leftist novels. *Poverty-Stricken*

*Alley* also puts much emphasis on class struggles, and Lü Lun's somewhat polarized division of different social classes in my opinion, is the weakest point of this novel. Yet his emphasis on class struggles and poverty also reflects the social inequality and insufficient job opportunities, which were indeed two serious issues in postwar Hong Kong. In 1954 when Edward Hambro was assigned by the UN to investigate the refugee problem in Hong Kong, he reported that "about 30 percent of people who have reached the proper age to work remained unemployed" (qtd. in Zhang 167). Apart from these similarities between *Poverty-Stricken Alley* and other leftist novels, the most apparent variance between this novel and other leftist writings is that Lü Lun does not have an apparent political agenda like other stereotypical leftist writers. It is true that he displays great sympathy towards the lower classes, but such sympathetic descriptions of their miserable life is not to propagandize anti-colonialism or anti-imperialism. There is discontent with the colonial government and the materialized society in Lü Lun's writings. This discontent probably was not rare among ordinary Hong Kong people after WWII. According to Tsang, when the colonial government resettled down in Hong Kong after Japanese left, Hong Kong faced a series of social problems. For the majority Chinese people, they began to feel that "there had been too much privilege, snobbery, discrimination, racial prejudice, corruption, and absentee exploitation against the local Chinese. They began to see the pre-war government as having failed to give due regard to their interests" (Tsang 142). After realizing the mistreatments that they have received, the



Chinese communities “looked forward to a radical reform which would provide the people of the colony with a greater say in public affairs. They wanted the framework of the new constitution to be clearly defined [although] they were not specific about what they wanted in the new constitution” (Tsang143).

I see a similar demand in Lü Lun’s writing that he wants to make a change to the unfair social system. More specifically, he wants an economic and cultural reform that will transform Hong Kong into a more equal and less materialized city. He wants a city that everyone is guaranteed the opportunity to make a change, and the right to live instead of barely surviving. Like those who are not specific about the new constitution, Lü Lun does not provide specific solutions to the problems he witnesses. His uncertainty about the future of the protagonists in Hong Kong also differs from many leftist novels, which consider returning to China as the only solution for these social problems. At the end of the novel, the three protagonists separate from each other. Luo Jian has to go back to mainland China to take care of the burial of his deceased wife but it is not certain whether he will come back to Hong Kong to earn a living. Mo Lun is determined to stay in Hong Kong, which has already become his home. As for Gao Huai, he decides to leave but Lü Lun does not explicitly tell where he is going. It is not clear whether Lü Lun decided to write in this way for fear that an additional “tail” will cause unnecessary trouble. But this uncertainty about the political and economic future of Hong Kong indeed reflects a period in limbo.

## Hong Kong in Limbo

In my opinion, after WWII, two important events affected the power struggles between the leftists and the rightists. One was the ever-developing refugee problem and the other was the 1967 riots. After the 1953 Shek Kip Mei fire, the refugee problem became an international concern. A lot of different political powers came into play in this problem<sup>53</sup>. According to Peterson, “most of the refugees did end up settling permanently in Hong Kong. This was due not to the refugees’ own wishes, however, but to the failure of the UNHCR and the international community more generally to solve the refugee crisis” (184). Although different political powers participated, in my opinion, the leftists had lost their second battle after 1949 when the “Immigrants writers” left Hong Kong. After 1949, the leftist camp still had several newspapers, whose major task was “spreading patriotism” (Ip 8). But the Chinese government did not take the refugee problem seriously. They did not even consider these immigrants as refugees because according to the Chinese government, Hong Kong was part of China and all those

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<sup>53</sup> Glen Peterson has a very detailed analysis of the role of each international power in this issue. The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) did not have any funding and they had to rely on the countries which provided financial support. The United States actively participated in this investigation with economic and diplomatic support. Under the Cold War mindset, private organization such as ARCI (Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals) also participated with the purpose to diminish the communist influence in Asia and establish a more positive image of the United States. The PRC and the KMT in Taiwan also had clear political concerns in their propaganda but they did not directly offer any solutions to the refugee problem. In the end, it was the colonial government’s direct intervention that finally resettled the refugees. See Peterson, 184-186.

Chinese immigrants merely moved from one Chinese city to another (Peterson 181). The failure of the Chinese government to offer any practical help to the refugees vetoed their demand for patriotism among Hong Kong people. At least, it was the colonial government that stopped the deterioration of the refugee problem. Peterson argues that “by 1954 Hong Kong’s rulers were in reality moving in the direction of providing the refugees with greater care and opportunities for resettlement within Hong Kong” (182). Without any doubt, after more people settled down in Hong Kong, their sense of belonging to this island also increased. By the early 1960s, most refugees had treated Hong Kong as their residential place, and to the colonial government, “what was needed was not only to build more resettlement estates...but also to accelerate ‘the process of integrating them more closely and making them feel they are citizens of Hong Kong’” (Mark, *Hong Kong* 29).

From a cultural perspective, the United States also successfully spread their influence in Hong Kong after the refugee problem. Private organizations such as ARCI coordinated “US anti-communist intelligence and propaganda activities” (Peterson 179). It is after 1954 that the Green Back Culture began to outweigh the leftist literary activities. But it was not until the 1967 riots that the leftist literary camp was seriously affected. The initial pressure first came from the more radical communist leaders in Hong Kong, who replaced Liao Chengzhi<sup>54</sup>, who insisted that Hong Kong should not be

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<sup>54</sup> To have a better idea about the changing situation in 1967 Hong Kong, especially after

involved in the Cultural Revolution. When the riots escalated and the radical leftists started their bomb campaign<sup>55</sup>, they lost support from the public. By early 1968 when the riots ended, “people became resentful of the leftists” and labelled them as “terrorists” and “trouble makers” (Ip 6). These radical riots caused more damage to the leftist literary camp when the British colonial government intervened and banned certain newspapers that were accused of conducting communist propaganda. By the end of 1967, leftist literary activities came to a complete stop (Zhang 18). Shortly after these riots, it is generally accepted that a stable Hong Kong identity gradually began to emerge and form. This formation of Hong Kong identity shifts away from political struggles but focuses on economic development, which depends on Hong Kong’s rapid industrialization. Together with its industrialization and urbanization, Hong Kong also witnessed the rise of a vibrant local popular culture, “one that increasingly mixed ideas and techniques from Western music and movies with the local culture and concerns of everyday life” (Tsang 192).

It is interesting if we go back to the first few lines in *Poverty-Stricken Alley*, where Lü Lun is disgusted at the juxtaposition of “refugees with broken luggage” with “middle class gentlemen and ladies who are attracted by the advertisement of new products such as Nylon stockings, glass raincoats, ball pens, Aspirin, DDT...” (2). He would never dream that one day the refugees would also possess the new products and watch the fancy

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the Gang of Four replaced Liao Chengzhi with new leaders, see Kai-yiu Ip and Ka-wai Cheung.

<sup>55</sup> To have a thorough understanding of the 1967 riots, see Ka-wai Cheung.

western advertisements. Of course, the gap between the rich and the poor has always been large. The Gini index in Hong Kong has always been higher than other developed countries and regions (Li 61). But the immigrants have successfully “transformed from desperate refugees struggling for survival into a modern labour force who were themselves consumers and a positive factor in further economic development” (Tsang 174). Indeed, the lower classes changed their fates, but not without the help with other social classes and the colonial government. History outlined a different path for the refugees from the one imagined by Lü Lun.

Contemporary readers who are not familiar with the 1950’s Hong Kong might find the one depicted in *Poverty-Stricken Alley* very strange. They will be disappointed if they look for a Hong Kong where the East meets the West, where hybridity populates, where the dream to change one’s class is never a disillusion. Instead, readers see a two-dimensional Hong Kong where the boundaries between rich and poor, between good and evil are clearly marked. The protagonists’ (and also Lü Lun’s) contempt at economic prosperity is also far from the Hong Kong Dream but reminds readers—who are under the influence of the Cold War—of the stereotypical image of communist China. After all, Lü Lun’s representation of Hong Kong diverges from the well-recognized image of Hong Kong. The four protagonists do not represent the successful Hong Kong people who benefit from the Hong Kong Dream.

That said, it would be ahistorical to criticize this novel for its failure to depict Hong

Kong as we now imagine it. Lü Lun's attempt to find a place for refugees in Hong Kong and his hope to change the society are worth our attention. At least, the rudiment of "Hong Kong Dream" already exists in his imagination and Lü Lun, like Gao Huai, never gives up his dream and is committed to writing serious novels about Hong Kong. The reception of Lü Lun's depictions of Hong Kong has changed over time. He has received compliments from his chief editors, as well as sincere feedback from his readers. Recently, this novel is less known due to the reasons that I outlined above. Nevertheless, the representation of Hong Kong in the novel is invaluable because it witnesses the critical moment in Hong Kong where a Hong Kong identity was about to form. Lü Lun's ambivalent political stance once again testifies the difficulty to pin down a stable Hong Kong identity at that time. Yet the limbo of Hong Kong during that specific historical moment is exactly the locality of Hong Kong back then.

What is more noteworthy is Lü Lun's effort to find his own place in a city that he considers extremely hostile. Just like the protagonists, who believe that they have a future, Lü Lun never gives up his literary pursuits. His persistence in writing is especially valuable considering the economic pressures he had to face in the industrializing and commercializing society. In fact, after *Poverty-Stricken Alley*, he had not published any significant works. He had to make a living and writing popular fictions became his only tool. Yuan Liangjun argues that the Hong Kong society "should be sorry" (對不起) for Lü Lun as well as Hong Kong literature (132). In the next chapter, I will look at the

pressure for intellectuals specifically. During such a transitional period, when the literary pursuits were in conflict with the reality, what would these authors do? Facing all types of difficulties, Lü Lun as well as his protagonists believe that they will find their place in the society, even though the novel does not specifically mentions where the future lies. In reality, Lü Lun sacrificed a lot for the sake of living. He is not the only writer who had to choose between writing serious literature and making a living. In the next chapter, I will look at Liu Yichang's depiction of a more desperate writer, who shows the anxiety of an "immigrant writer" and is desperate to find his place in 1960's Hong Kong.

## CHAPTER 4

### SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN

#### LIU YICHANG'S SELF-POSITIONING IN *THE DRUNKARD*

The last three chapters analyze the ways in which immigrants in Hong Kong negotiate their existence in this transient city at a critical historical moment. Regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, which affect their different ways to represent the city of Hong Kong, the process during which they find their own niche in Hong Kong is inseparable from their literary creation. More specifically, Richard Mason, Han Suyin, and Lü Lun, intentionally or not, all use their writings to locate themselves in the city. Interestingly enough, the protagonists in these novels like their authors, are also engaged in various cultural productions. These characters record the historical transformations in Hong Kong either with images as Robert Lomax does, or with words, as the characters Suyin and Gao Huai do. In most cases, the ability to paint or write empowers the characters in the sense that they have the authority to assert their own identity in their imagined city of Hong Kong. For instance, Robert secures his Westernness through painting Suzie Wong and Suyin the character uses writing to commemorate her deceased



lover and the city of Hong Kong, both of which make her dual worlds possible. In my opinion, Mason and Han's emphasis on the power of cultural production in fact neglects the social reality that sometimes makes such production impossible in Hong Kong. As I stated in Chapter Three, Lü Lun did not always have the "freedom" to write due to realistic reasons and being a writer in Hong Kong does not offer him as much "authority" as that enjoyed by the fictional characters.

Nevertheless, in Lü Lun's writing, he still emphasizes the power of literature and the significant role of writers and artists. In *Poverty-Stricken Alley*, Gao Huai is portrayed as the mentor for his friends. When there is a fight among others, Gao Huai would interfere and almost without exception, his friends would take his advice. He would act "as if he were a judge, inquiring the testimonies" from both sides (Lü 65). Sometimes, Gao Huai acts like an omniscient commentator, judging people around them and predicting their fates. At the very beginning, Gao Huai is sure that Ah Zhen is a superficial woman and Du Quan would end up in a tragedy. Lü Lun's depiction of Gao Huai as the leader however, does not provide an answer to his financial problems. At the end of the novel, Gao Huai leaves Hong Kong because he cannot solve the conflicts between his literary career and the commercialization of the society. Likewise, Lü Lun faced similar dilemma in his life. On the one hand, Lü Lun emphasizes the power of literary production—in a similar way as Mason and Han do; but on the other hand, Lü Lun is powerless when facing the money-oriented society. In the novel, Gao Huai leaves Hong Kong but in

reality Lü Lun never left Hong Kong after 1945.

As I pointed out at the end of last chapter, Lü Lun's financial situation significantly affected his writing career. And he was not the only one who faced such a quandary. After WWII, many writers left mainland China for various reasons and a great many of them finally settled down in Hong Kong. How to make a balance between their literary pursuit and the need to earn a living was a question faced by many writers in the 1950s.

According to Liu Yichang, "to keep a pure literary motivation was not easy" during that time (Liu, *Talking* 125). "Many writers, in order to survive in a highly commercialized society, had to produce 'merchandise' and at the same time write the novels that they wanted to write" (Liu, *Talking* 129). According to Liu, "merchandise" included writings that served for specific ideological purposes as well as "vulgar" fictions that suited the tastes of the reading market. Like Lü Lun, who had to write popular fictions to earn a living, Liu Yichang also went through a long period when he simply wrote to survive<sup>56</sup>. It is not until 1986 when he was able to concentrate on the journal *Hong Kong Literature* (香港文學), the oldest surviving literature journal in Hong Kong.

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<sup>56</sup> To have a better understanding of Liu Yichang's career, especially the earlier years, see Ji Hongfang. According to Ji, Liu Yichang moved his Huaizheng Cultural Association 懷正文化社, a publishing house to Hong Kong because he considered that Hong Kong was comparatively safe. However, his plan ended in naught due to a couple of reasons. The newly established regime in mainland China finally made him drop the idea to return to China. But in order to survive, Liu Yichang wrote many entertaining stories from 1957 to 1985. According to Liu Yichang, many of these writings were vulgar and he greatly abridged a few and remained reluctant to talk about them. Pp.79-80.

Meanwhile, Liu Yichang never stopped writing the novels that he wanted to write. More than often, in these novels, Liu Yichang consciously reflects upon the roles of writers and offers evaluation of literature. In this chapter, I will examine Liu Yichang's 1962 novel *The Drunkard* (*Jiutu* 酒徒), especially his depiction of the quandary of writers in Hong Kong during that time period. The novel centers on an anonymous protagonist<sup>57</sup>, whose life resembles that of Liu Yichang's. Jiutu starts writing when he is fourteen but when he arrives in Hong Kong, the harsh reality and life pressure force him to abandon his literary pursuit to write martial arts fictions and pornographic novels. After continuous frustrations, Jiutu attempts to commit suicide. But life continues and he can only live on with more alcohol. This novel does not have a clear storyline and the sentences and words that Liu Yichang uses are quite lyrical and sometimes fragmented. Obviously, such an experimental style is not targeted at readers who are looking for entertaining stories.

In a 1995 speech that Liu Yichang delivered to the students at Hong Kong University, he explicitly talked about three major reasons why he wanted to write *The Drunkard*. The most important and probably the most famous one is that he “wanted to find a true self” (Liu, *Talking* 118). He has been writing “merchandise” for years just to entertain the readers and this novel is to “entertain himself” (119). He also mentions two

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<sup>57</sup> For the sake of clarity, I will call this protagonist Jiutu.

other reasons, one is to “reveal some phenomena in Hong Kong society from the perspective of an intellectual, especially the fact that Hong Kong literature has been losing its essential characteristics because of commercialization and vulgarization” (119). The other is that Liu Yichang “has some thoughts about the literature after the May Fourth Movement” (120). He points out that certain writers such as Duanmu Hongliang and Mu Shiyong have not received enough attention and he wants to offer a reevaluation of these writers and their writings through the protagonist Jiutu.

I think Liu Yichang’s motivations to write *The Drunkard* have been well recognized. Due to his experimental style, *The Drunkard* is often hailed by Chinese scholars as “the first stream-of-consciousness novel in Chinese language.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, this novel entertains not only Liu Yichang himself, but also scholars and readers who can appreciate good literature. Liu Yichang’s critique of the commercialization of Hong Kong culture also receives support from other intellectuals. Many scholars argue that in *The Drunkard*, Liu Yichang uses modernism to “criticize the materialization and commercialization of culture in Hong Kong” (Zhao 181). But there are also scholars who are troubled by Liu Yichang’s adoption of the technique of the stream of consciousness. Liu Su, for instance, argues that “streams of consciousness are visible throughout the novel, but the depiction of Hong Kong’s social contexts is not as profound” (138).

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<sup>58</sup> This title has become so popular, especially among Chinese academia that almost every essay on *The Drunkard* would not forget to mention it.

Underneath these conflicting evaluations of this novel, there is deeper divergence among these literary critics. Liu Su, who wishes to see more social contexts of Hong Kong, seems to suggest that *The Drunkard* fails to function as a Hong Kong novel. On the other hand, most scholars in mainland China, who regard Liu Yichang as the first Chinese writer to use the stream of consciousness, tend to de-emphasize the Hong Kong elements in *The Drunkard*. Instead, they consider that Liu Yichang is one of the great Chinese authors who have contributed to the development of Chinese literature by adopting western writing techniques. Liu Yichang's critique of the vulgar Hong Kong culture further testifies his position as a responsible Chinese intellectual, who possesses a superior cultural awareness. In my opinion, these different views on Liu Yichang and *The Drunkard* indeed reflect the dilemma of Liu Yichang. I argue that overall Liu Yichang considered himself a Chinese writer instead of a Hong Kong writer, when he was writing *The Drunkard*. The lack of substantial depictions of the city of Hong Kong and his contempt for the commercialized culture display Liu Yichang's cultural superiority as a Chinese writer from mainland. Therefore, unlike writers in the 1970s, who focus on the interaction between their city and people's daily lives, Liu Yichang does not give any detailed and substantial description of city of Hong Kong. Also noticeable is Liu Yichang's distaste for the popular culture in 1960s Hong Kong. Examples include "forty-cent novels" (四毫子小說) such as martial arts fictions and pornographic fictions; Chinese films based on these novels; and the irresponsible cultural critics who fail to

point out the correct direction for literary and cultural development. According to Lo Kwai-cheung, contempt for popular culture was popular among early immigrant writers, but seldom existed among later writers after 1970s. Lo argues that writers such as Xi Xi, who was “born in Hong Kong, does not have to fight as a marginalized person” (67).

With economic development during 1970s, “mass popular culture also prospered and young people became the beneficiaries and major consumers of this culture” (K. Lo 67).

Thus, these writers’ attitudes toward popular culture are different from their predecessors such as Liu Yichang, whose perception of literature reflects his cultural elitism.

Examining Jiutu’s cultural elitism, the first part of this chapter will look at the contrast between China and Hong Kong in his eyes. To Jiutu/the drunkard, Hong Kong does not value serious literature and morality is worthless. Jiutu has too many sorrowful lessons from his ex-girlfriend who sells “love” for money; from his so-called friend who steals Jiutu’s script and produces a blockbuster; from publishers who refuse to publish his novels; from the indifferent masses who understand nothing about literature. Jiutu’s suffering indicates his failure to be socially integrated into the Hong Kong society. Instead, he indulges himself in his nostalgia for Shanghai, for the glorious Chinese literary tradition since the May Fourth movement, and for his social status as a Chinese writer.

On the other hand, Liu Yichang does not create any heroic protagonist who is able to fight against the trend of commercialization and capitalization. Jiutu constantly

complains and wants to do something to change the reality, such as helping his Hongkongese friend Mai Hemen establish a literary magazine. Nevertheless, Jiutu never thinks about leaving Hong Kong and returning to China. Unlike Gao Huai, who insists that his literary dream can only come true somewhere outside Hong Kong, Jiutu remains in Hong Kong and starts writing for livelihood. Jiutu is inevitably enmeshed in the cultural productions in Hong Kong. He even views Hong Kong as a possible place to inherit and reform the Chinese literary tradition since May Fourth. From this perspective, *The Drunkard* is indeed a Hong Kong novel because I see similarities between Liu Yichang's worry about the commercialization and vulgarization of literature and Wu Xie's anxiety about the disappearing Chinese traditions that I discussed in Chapter One. Wu Xie is concerned that westernization in Hong Kong would gradually erode the Chinese culture and tradition in Hong Kong. In a similar manner, Liu Yichang's critique of popular culture in Hong Kong is out of his fear that Chinese literary tradition would end in Hong Kong. Through the protagonist Jiutu, Liu Yichang utters his determination to preserve the literary traditions in Hong Kong, to guide the Hong Kong readers to appreciate serious literature, and ideally alter the value system in Hong Kong. Something tricky in Liu Yichang's agenda is that he tends to use Western techniques to reform Chinese literature in Hong Kong. This plan somehow betrays his self-positioning as an "authentic" Chinese writer. Why is it possible for Jiutu to reevaluate the Chinese literary tradition since May Fourth in Hong Kong? What are the possible ways for him to

preserve “the vigor of Chinese literature” (中國文學的元氣)? I will explore these questions in the second part of this chapter.

Reading *The Drunkard*, however, might not offer us clear answers to these questions. Generally speaking, Jiutu is tortured by his split worlds. He does not want to abandon his self-perception as an intellectual and writer, but he cannot stop the overwhelming development of popular culture. Is there a way out for Jiutu? As Lo Kwai-cheung points out, “literature in Hong Kong has not been elevated or institutionalized to an independent ‘aesthetics’ in the functional differentiation of modernity, nor degenerated into pure commodity by the virulence of capital. But its vitality and critical capacity are precisely inherent in this moment of in-betweenness” (138). For many Hong Kong writers who are originally from mainland China, the biggest challenge is how to accept the in-betweenness of literature, and more importantly the in-betweenness of their own social status. At the time when Liu Yichang wrote *The Drunkard*, he did not really believe in such an in-betweenness. The last part of this chapter will compare Jiutu with another character Sima Li, a representative of the postwar Hong Kong generation. Jiutu and Sima Li have no common ground, which once again reveals the difficulty for writers from mainland China to adjust to the new cultural environment in Hong Kong.

Nevertheless, twelve years after *The Drunkard* was published, Liu Yichang in his novella *Tete-Beche* 對倒 saw a different possibility for these writers to cross different boundaries and embrace their in-betweenness. Hong Kong could be a city for the Chinese



intellectuals as well as a city for the young city dwellers.

### **From Center to Margin**

As a writer from mainland China, Jiutu possesses a strong sense of superiority when arriving in Hong Kong. When the novel starts, Jiutu is making fun of the literary trend in Hong Kong. He sees a waitress and imagines how he should incorporate her into his martial arts fiction. He would depict her “as the mistress of Huang Feihong (a famous martial art master in Canton). She would stand on her head in a skyscraper at Queens Road and steal a glance at a secretary who is sitting on the lap of Mr. Huang” (1). This combination of folk tales (Huang Feihong is especially popular in the Canton area, even today), martial arts, and erotic plots is what readers expect. To Jiutu, this type of writing is not literature. Actually, for many writers from mainland China, their first impression about the Hong Kong culture is probably that Hong Kong does not have any serious literature. Gao Huai in *Poverty-Stricken Alley* shares a similar point of view about literature in Hong Kong. The reason why Gao Huai arrives in Hong Kong is that it has a comparatively peaceful environment for him to write while the mainland is engulfed by the Chinese Civil War. When Gao Huai discovers that Hong Kong is not the right place for his literary career, he leaves without hesitation.

Both Jiutu and Gao Huai’s contempt on Hong Kong culture reveals what Steve Tsang calls the “sojourner mentality.” According to Tsang, before the 1950s, “there was

free and regular movement of people to and from China. This produced a sojourner mentality and largely accounted for the non-development of a sense of local identity” (181). The reasons why a sense of local identity failed to develop among these immigrants are multifold. In the case of Jiutu and Gao Huai, their sojourner mentality mainly has to do with their literati status. In fact, this mentality has a long tradition among literati, especially those who were originally from mainland China. The sense of being a sojourner often goes together with a sense of superiority, not necessarily in terms of economy but more related to culture. Chinese literati who arrived in Hong Kong as early as the nineteenth century might be surprised at the economic developments in Hong Kong. This economic advantage in Hong Kong however, is not strong enough to counteract its lack of cultural atmosphere.

One of the earliest Chinese literati who write about Hong Kong is Wang Tao 王韜. He was involved in the Taiping Rebellion and fled to Hong Kong seeking political refuge in 1862. Many scholars have discussed Wang Tao’s Sinocentrism in his essays about Hong Kong<sup>59</sup>. In “A Brief Discussion of Hong Kong” 香港略論, which is included in *Collection of Essays from the Tao Garden* 弢園文錄外編, Wang Tao reviews the social, economic, political, and cultural situations in nineteenth-century Hong Kong. He notices that Hong Kong, after its cession to Britain, has quite integral systems. Wang Tao

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<sup>59</sup> For a discussion about Wang Tao’s writing about Hong Kong, see Zhao Xifang and Wong Wang-chi.

specifically mentions the extensive use of electricity. In contrast to its civilizing and modernizing process, Hong Kong in Wang Tao's opinion, still has some serious problems. The most noticeable is the living conditions for lower classes. Many of them had to crowd in a tiny room. Wang Tao compares these people to "silkworms in a cocoon" and considers that "those tiny rooms are not places for human beings to live in" 非復人類所居 (263). With regard to people who are extremely rich, Wang Tao regrets that they "stay away from rituals and classics, and pay no attention to morality" 脱略礼文，迂嗤道德 (264). This short essay was written three years after Wang Tao settled down in Hong Kong, and overall he considers that the British administration was efficient. The image of Hong Kong in this essay was drastically improved compared to his first impression. Not long after Wang Tao arrived in Hong Kong, in a letter to his brother-in-law, Wang Tao describes his disappointment at Hong Kong. In his eyes, "it is a tiny and isolated island accustomed to prioritizing selling scarce merchandises." In terms of its residents, "most are uncivilized guys with tools to make money. How could the society have any cultured people?" 蕞爾絕島，其俗素以操贏居奇為尚。錐刀之徒，逐利而至，豈有雅流在其間哉？ (qtd. in Wong, 36).

It seems that after three years of residence in Hong Kong, Wang Tao became more tolerant towards the local customs and lifestyles. From economic and political aspects, British colonization had brought vast changes to the once barren island. What remained unchanged is his disappointment at local cultures. At least, for literati like Wang Tao,

Hong Kong did not have any cultural and literary atmosphere. This uneasiness with local culture—or rather the non-existence of a local culture—resulted in many immigrant writers treating Hong Kong merely as a place of sojourn. This hierarchy between orthodox Chinese culture and Hong Kong local culture continued even after the first generation of immigrants settled down in Hong Kong after 1950s. Although local scholars such as Wong Wang-chi emphasizes that Hong Kong has not always been otherized,<sup>60</sup> it is still regarded as a marginalized place among immigrant writers from mainland China, especially in terms of its cultural and literary achievements. Many of them left Hong Kong and returned to China after WWII. For those who decided to stay, bias towards the local culture continued.

Contrast to these literati who insisted on their cultural superiority, a great majority of immigrants, who arrived in Hong Kong during the 1950s, had a totally different mentality. According to Tsang, most immigrants possessed “the refugee mentality,” which is a social mentality accompanying social changes between China and Hong Kong after the 1950s (170). These changes include political change in mainland China (namely the newly-founded communist regime), economic gaps (Hong Kong’s economic took off during the 1960s), as well as diplomatic reasons (the border between Hong Kong and

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<sup>60</sup> See Wong’s discussion of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, who get revolutionary inspirations from the political system in Hong Kong, which also functions as a revolutionary base for Sun Yat-sen. See Wong, *Historical Incidents*, pp. 37-47.

China was closed in 1950), all of which led to a cease of free movement of people between China and Hong Kong. Unlike earlier sojourners, most immigrants during the 1950s, whether they were entrepreneurs with money and resources, or refugees with bare hands, “saw British enclave as the lifeboat with China being the sea...they did more than just stay passively on board and wait to be rescued. They used all their imagination, ingenuity, available resources, hard work and sheer single-minded determination to make sure the lifeboat sailed to safety” (170). Tsang argues that it is this refugee mentality that makes the economic miracle of Hong Kong possible. Due to economic development during the 1960s, Hong Kong gradually transformed from an entr pot highly dependent on the trade with China to an industrialized colony, a trading center for East Asia. The process of industrialization and capitalization turn the Hong Kong society into a money-oriented one. Its overemphasis on economic success does not go along with intellectuals’ need for serious literature. Instead, the writing process is also commercialized and literature becomes mere products. Under such a circumstance, literati’s contempt towards local culture accumulates, and in this novel, writing becomes Jiutu’s weapon to criticize the commercialized society of Hong Kong.

### **Hong Kong, “The Concentration Camp of Evilness”**

Under capitalism, everything becomes a commodity. This is the first and most obvious message that Liu Yichang wants to convey in *The Drunkard*. Not only do people

focus on producing merchandises and making money, but even things which are not supposed to be merchandise can be traded for money. These include human emotions, literature and culture, and even one's own pride. As J. M. Bernstein argues, "culture has become openly, and defiantly, an industry obeying the same rules of production as any other producer of commodities. Cultural production is an integrated component of the capitalist economy as a whole" (9). Jiutu, who refuses to be assimilated into this culture industry, remains excluded from capitalist economy and even the whole society in Hong Kong. Such an alienation brings Jiu economic poverty, which leads to his further exclusion from the society.

In Jiutu's continuous illusions, he once dreams about becoming rich. In this dream, he wants to take revenge against four specific persons: his landlord, his merciless friend, his snobbish ex-girlfriend, and a publishing house owner. From these four persons, we can get a brief idea about the problems faced by Jiutu. Housing was a prevalent problem in the 1950s and 1960s, as I analyzed in the previous chapter. This once again reveals Jiutu's awful economic condition. Jiutu's friend Zhao Zhiyao, "who refused to lend him 20 dollars when Jiutu sincerely begged him" and his ex-girlfriend Zhang Lili, "who turned down his love because he was poor" are among the many examples which show the indifference between human beings in Hong Kong (3). In fact, Jiutu's feeling towards Zhang Lili is very complicated. On the one hand, he loves her; on the other, he is also aware that Zhang Lili will never love him because he is poor. Zhang Lili is a femme

fatale figure, whose “smile, eyes, teeth, hair, thoughts, words, posture of smoking, and mouth with orange lipstick...” are all her weapons. In front of Zhang Lili, Jiutu is always a loser. Therefore, when Zhang Lili asks Jiutu to pretend as her husband and blackmail a textile factory owner, who has sexual relationship with her, Jiutu cannot say no to her.

The result is that Jiutu is beaten by the factory owner and is hospitalized. Zhang Lili shows no sympathy towards Jiutu because according to her, he “deserved to be beaten” as a pauper (36). Zhang Lili ends up in marrying that factory owner because he has money. Jiutu’s conclusion is that “money was the master of everything. Money was devil, and it was more powerful than God, especially in a society like Hong Kong” (130). His love towards Zhang Lili is turned down because he does not have money. Because of money, Zhang Lili becomes a mere “stone that breathes” (46). In Jiutu’s mind, Zhang Lili “trades her soul for money with the devil” but he cannot comprehend how she is able “freeze her emotions” (43). He then blames the Hong Kong society for turning Zhang Lili into an emotionless machine, whose only purpose is to make money. The image of Zhang Lili therefore is associated with the city of Hong Kong: “Zhang Lili’s eyes, seeds of evilness. Zhang Lili was a Hongkonger. Hong Kong was the concentration camp of evilness” (44).

Love is not reliable, nor is friendship. In the novel, Jiutu encounters a film director Mo Yu, who “often plagiarizes the Hollywood style” (56). He persuades Jiutu to write a film script for him and promises to pay him three thousand dollars. Jiutu never receives the money because Mo Yu tells him that the script is not accepted until one day Jiutu sees

the film at the theatre. Mo Yu steals Jiutu's script without paying him anything. However, "payment for the script is not the most important; what is more disgusting is that Mo Yu is credited as the playwright" (Liu 111). Jiutu has known Mo Yu for more than twenty years and in the past "he was not as despicable. Maybe because he has been in the film industry for too long, he has become so cunning" (111). Jiutu demands his money back, but Mo Yun sends him only fifty dollars. Jiutu thinks to himself, "friendship is the least reliable thing in Hong Kong" (117). Suffering various betrayals from his lover and friends, Jiutu cannot face the harsh reality and is determined to be indulged in alcohol and his illusionary world.

Apart from these personal frustrations, what is more disappointing about Hong Kong society is the commercialization of literature and culture. According to Jiutu, "the cultural atmosphere in Hong Kong was lighter and lighter. In book-stores, you could only find martial arts fictions, pornographic fictions, forty-cent fictions, fake literary novels with colorful covers and visible typos ... The book-store owners aimed for making money. They needed only merchandises not real literary works" (177). Jiutu has great talents and literary ambitions, but in a society like Hong Kong, his talents are not recognized and his books have no market. Apart from capitalist economy, which was widespread all around the world, there were deep-seated reasons why authors who wrote serious literature had such a difficult time in 1960s Hong Kong. When Mai Hemen asks Jiutu why Hong Kong authors cannot write masterpieces such as *War and Peace*, Jiutu outlines eight factors.



These include: “The lives of the authors were unstable; the readers’ tastes were too low to appreciate good literature; the government could not protect the rights of the writers; piracy issues, lack of far-sighted publishers, lack of motivation for writers, lack of literary critics, and extremely low copyright loyalty” (21). It seems that everyone involved in literary production and transmission are responsible for the deteriorating literary atmosphere in Hong Kong.

In the Hong Kong depicted in *The Drunkard*, writing serious literature guarantees neither money nor fame and therefore most writers either stop writing or start catering for the readers’ tastes. When the story of *The Drunkard* begins, Jiutu has already started serializing martial arts fictions for over a year. He feels it hard to understand how come “readers would indeed follow the author’s imagination to enter an illusory world” (Liu 4). But that is the sad reality that Jiutu faces: “Only essays which told stories of killing someone from miles away could be traded for money” (8). Similar accusations of the literary environment in Hong Kong appear from time to time in this novel. For instance, Jiutu states that “in Hong Kong, art was the most worthless” (57). Many artists could barely survive. In order to earn a living, they had to go against their conscience to write “forty-cent novels” and even Liu Yichang himself had written quite a few martial arts fictions. Compared to these popular fictions, serious literature has no market because “the merits of essays were determined by their business potentials ... Arts and literature, in the mind of those who only seek money and fame, were only a layer of sugar coat covered by

toxins” (76). The result is that “Hong Kong has no literature” but who cares (33)? For most writers, “writing these fictions was like producing merchandises” (126). Out of rage, Jiutu sometimes curses the world: “This is a cannibalistic society. The more shameless one is, the higher they will climb the social ladder. Those who have conscience are forever at the bottom of the society” (112).

It seems that real artists are completely alienated from the publishers who only seek fame and money. But not everyone thinks the same way as Jiutu. There are many “smart” writers in Hong Kong who “had bought their own flats and cars, while Jiutu was still writing serious literature in simi-starvation” (113). The whole situation is beyond help. Jiutu even imagines the fate of Hemingway in Hong Kong. No one would read his novels, which could not meet the low tastes of the local readers. Therefore, it is likely that Hemingway would starve in Hong Kong (5). Since a literary master such as Hemingway might not be able to survive, what meaning is there for Jiutu to insist on writing serious literature? In the middle of the novel, Jiutu finally decides to write pornographic novels, and he says to himself:

I was desperate and disappointed, and I decided not to do anything relevant to serious arts. To be frank, in such an environment, even if I was able to write a fiction like *Old Man and the Sea*, who were there to appreciate it? Those green-back writers advocated restoration of classic Chinese while those young people who received western education did not

understand Chinese words at all apart from ABCD. As far as those fake “intellectuals” who treated martial arts fictions the Holy Bible, they would not spend time reading *The Old Man and Sea* even if they were offered ten dollars. If I could be a European or American in my next life, I would devote all my life to serious literature. (123)

The last sentence once again points all the root of the problem to the city of Hong Kong. In Jiutu’s opinion, in such an evil city no talented people will survive. Literature as well as people who write good literature are doomed in this society. In Hong Kong, “the more artistic a book was, the more difficult was it to be published. On the contrary, martial arts fictions and pornographic novels, which contained literary toxins were popular targets for publishing houses” (139). But even writing pornographic novel is not easy. Writers have to produce certain amount of words at specific time every day. When Jiutu once again gets drunken and does not submit his writing on time, his two columns are taken away by others immediately. In his soberness, Jiutu cries that “in Hong Kong, being a professional writer means to view oneself as a machine” (164). The tasks of the writers are to “sell their writings as merchandises just like women sell love and girls sell virginity. Everything is a merchandise” (164). Jiutu takes a bottle of Dettol and wants to leave the “morbid century” (191) when he is saved by his kind landlady who mistakes him for her dead son.

Jiutu ascribes his poverty and his failure to write great literature to the

commercialized society and everyone in the cultural industry. But is commercialization the only reason that leads to Jiutu's frustration? Not exactly. In the novel, Jiutu encounters two old acquaintances. One of them used to work at the same newspaper with Jiutu. This person forgets about literature and becomes a businessman after arriving in Hong Kong, where he starts trade with Japan. Jiutu is astonished to find that this old colleague has completely forgotten the bitter memories of the eight years' Sino-Japanese War and has successfully integrated into the materialistic culture. The other is Jiutu's former classmate, a college graduate, who is doing poorly-paid part-time jobs. But he is very optimistic with his current situation. According to him, "university graduates doing part-time jobs were not despicable. The most important was: could one be comfortable living with poverty? Could people decrease their desires? Could they peacefully accept the reality?" (169). Jiutu despises the first and admires the second. But why could not Jiutu live like his former classmate? If he is so dissatisfied with the cultural environment in Hong Kong, why doesn't he leave Hong Kong, as Gao Huai does? In my opinion, Jiutu's dilemma lies in the fact that he is trapped between the "sojourner mentality" and the "refugee mentality." On the one hand, he still regards himself a *Chinese* writer, whose responsibility is to carry on the Chinese literary and cultural traditions in Hong Kong. But on the other hand, Jiutu also possesses the "refugee mentality" not in the sense of making economic progress, but how to treat Hong Kong as a literary base where he can make literary contribution to the Chinese literature. His in-betweenness of these two

mentality is best displayed in his claim of preserving the vigor of Chinese literature.

### **Vigor of Chinese Literature**

In *The Drunkard*, Jiutu clearly states his literary ambition, which is best represented by the magazine that he helps Mai Hemen establish. They name the magazine *Avant-garde Literature* with two most important purposes: “to offer unbiased judgment of literary achievements since May Fourth Movement and to point out the new literary direction in a sincere way” (102). He further explains that the only possible way to achieve these two aims is to revolutionize the outdated realist writing style since the May Fourth Movement and borrow from Western modernity. To Jiutu, “realism was outdated. Realism should perish. Modern novelists should explore the internal reality 內在的真實 of human kind” (62). In addition, Jiutu wants to adopt “internal reality” as the judging standard to reevaluate the so-called canons from the May Fourth period. From this perspective, is Jiutu the spokesperson for Liu Yichang, who tries to challenge the literary tradition since the May Fourth period? Does his proposition to revolutionize Chinese literature conflict with his claim to preserve the vigor of Chinese literature? What indeed is the vigor of Chinese literature and how could he possibly preserve it in Hong Kong?

In the novel, Jiutu does not offer a clear definition of what literature is. But he provides some examples of writings that according to him should be excluded from the realm of literature, and the two types that Jiutu despises most are martial arts fictions and

pornographic novels. This distinction between literature and popular writings is one of the many debates between high 雅 and low 俗 culture. According to Chen Pingyuan, “in the eyes of experts and normal readers, popular fiction is no real ‘literature.’ This common bias against popular literature is rooted in the ‘myth of literature’ that was constructed during the May Fourth period” (116). An interesting fact is that the May Fourth scholars never really defined what popular fiction<sup>61</sup> was. However, they do mention specific forms and contents that are non-literary. Chen points out that an important hypothesis established during the May Fourth period was that “chapter fiction 章回小說 is the same as popular fiction” and should not be considered as literature (120). In terms of the contents, Chen concludes that May Fourth scholars believe that literature should “raise the common people’s powers of appreciation and intellectual taste” (119). In *The Drunkard*, Liu Yichang explicitly excludes popular fictions from the realm of literature because of their common adoption of the form of chapter fiction, and their exaggerating and illusory contents. In terms of the social function of literature, Jiutu admits that a literary magazine like *Avant-garde Literature* is not for ordinary readers “who are used to reading classic Chinese novels” (91). To readers who do not know the difference between author and narrator, as in Charles Dickens’ autobiographical novel

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<sup>61</sup> According to Chen Pingyuan, there were various and sometimes even conflicting definitions of popular fiction during the May Fourth period. Chen specifically compares the definitions offered by Liu Bannong, Zhou Zuoren, Hu Shi, and Guo Moruo, pp. 116-121.

*David Copperfield*, Jiutu thinks that they will not be able to appreciate literature. Thus, Liu Yichang's definition of literature in this novel, to a great extent, follows the May Fourth scholars.

However, to preserve the vigor of Chinese literature means more than inheriting the literary tradition. It also means to read against both the May Fourth writers, who "forcefully promoted a whole sale acceptance of Western literary thought and aesthetics," as well as a "framework of narration and standards of appreciation" that follows specific ideological principles in communist China after 1950 (Chen 131, 122). In order to rejuvenate Chinese literature, Jiutu wants to introduce the latest trends in world literature to reform Chinese literature so that it will catch up and finds its own position. Jiutu's import of Avant-garde literature shows his belief in the famous claim made by the reformers at the end of Qing Dynasty: "Chinese Learning as the Fundamental Structure, Western Learning for Practical Use" 中學為體西學為用. Jiutu uses a metaphor to describe the necessity to borrow from the West. "We were a race living on rice, and every one formed the habit of eating rice since childhood, and this was hard to change. However, we could not unreasonably deny the nutrition of bread simply because of this habit" (178-179). This proposition has two layers of meanings: first, China has glorious literary traditions, and second, the current literary development in China is lagging behind the West. Literature needs innovations to stay alive, which means that Chinese authors should borrow from the Western techniques. However, the contents have to be

Chinese.

To prove that China has great literature, Jiutu goes back to Cao Xueqin's *The Dream of Red Chamber*. In Jiutu's opinion, the success of *The Dream of Red Chamber* as a masterpiece lies in the fact that Cao Xueqin's writing is anti-traditional. Jiutu even compares this novel to other masterpieces of the world. According to him, *The Dream of Red Chamber* is a realist novel. When Cao Xueqin used realism in his writing, "Rousseau was still writing *The Confessions*. It was after thirty years that Goethe finished the first part of *Faust*. About forty years later, J. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was published...."

(7). That is to say, Chinese literature used to be ahead of Western literature, and our writing technique used to be more innovative. Therefore, there is no need to belittle Chinese literature and copy completely from the West. Some writers try to write in English, wishing to receive recognition from Western critics. Jiutu argues that this attempt is pointless since the Westerners do not really understand China. "In their mind, Chinese men had pigtailed while Chinese women had bound feet. Therefore, they could only appreciate *Stories from a Ming Collection* 三言兩拍" (18). The task to rejuvenate Chinese literature, as a result, can only be done by Chinese scholars, who insist writing in Chinese. The only problem with contemporary Chinese literature is that since the May Fourth Movement, mainstream literary critics put too much emphasis on realist writings, which in Jiutu's opinion, has already become outdated. To make things worse, most writings that mimic the styles of May Fourth authors are even more outdated. Jiutu



tells Mai Hemen that

The so-called artistic fictions were much worse than writings in May Fourth Movement. Some people were devoted to catching up with those writers but even if they succeeded, they were still very outdated. In fact, fictions written during the May Fourth Movement were inferior compared to world classics during the same time period. If contemporary novelists were satisfied to achieve the May Fourth level, then we would never have our place in world literature. (61)

The above comments reveal the second aspects of Chinese literature, which he wants to reform, i.e., we need serious literary critics who can introduce the latest literary trends around the world, and give an unbiased reevaluation of Chinese literature after 1919.

Since the May Fourth Movement, Chinese literature has “created” many masterpieces. Nonetheless, many good novels and their authors remain neglected. In his first “lecture” for Mai Hemen, Jiutu systematically evaluates the literary accomplishments since the May Fourth Movement. According to him, the works of Mao Dun and Ba Jin are not that good. Jiutu personally prefers the writing by Li Jieren and Duanmu Hongliang. In terms of stylists, “Shen Congwen is among the very few who deserve this title. Also, one cannot forget Zhang Ailing, Duanmu Hongliang, and Shituo” (18). Considering the fact that Liu Yichang was writing in 1962, one year after C. T. Hsia published his ground-breaking *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, it is noteworthy that

Liu Yichang was indeed following the latest literary trend in the world<sup>62</sup>. What is more remarkable is Jiutu's (or rather Liu Yichang's) courage to advocate for adopting the modernist writing style.

Liu Yichang's integration of western writing techniques into Chinese literature is more than one decade ahead of the debate started in mainland China after 1977<sup>63</sup>.

Basically the debates in mainland China went through three phases, from "do we need modernism<sup>64</sup>" to "do we have good modernist literature" to "do we really have modernism." Liu Yichang provided his answers to all these questions as early as in 1962.

As Jiutu argues, China does have modernist literature, namely writings by the stylists.

And Chinese literature does need modernism because different literary eras demand different writing techniques and adopting modernism would allow Chinese literature to return to the first rank among world literatures, thus promoting national consciousness. In

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<sup>62</sup> C. T. Hsia's *A History Of Modern Chinese Fiction* is a major work in the field of modern Chinese literature. He is among the earliest critics to bring writers such as Qian Zhongshu, Zhang Ailing and Shen Congwen back to scholarly attention. Due to the fact that these authors do not have an apparent revolutionary agenda in their writings, they were often neglected by literary critics during Maoist China. Hsia's praise of their works enables them to become more widely recognized.

<sup>63</sup> To have a complete understanding of the timelines of these debates in China, see Xu Zidong "Modernism and Chinese Literature in the New Era."

<sup>64</sup> According to Xu Zidong, scholars who oppose modernism take a political perspective for fear that modernism would devalue the importance of socialist realism and the power structure of the communist regime, while those who support it focus on the evolving literary development in different time periods. Neither side can persuade the other easily and the only way out is to find another factor. Xu Zidong argues, this third element is "consciousness of a national culture" (233).

1962, Jiutu predicts that one day people will recognize the value of modernism and literature, and indeed his predication came true in 1970s mainland China.

Liu Yichang's revision of Chinese literary tradition certainly displays his own literary talents. On the other hand, it affirms Liu Yichang's self-perception as a Chinese writer.

What is noteworthy though is that such a revision cannot be separated from the social contexts in Hong Kong. During the 1960s, Hong Kong had more access to Western literary theories compared to mainland China and Taiwan. The free flow of capital, people, and culture made it the meeting point for Chinese and Western literature. More importantly, the reason why Jiutu sees such an urgency to rejuvenate Chinese literature is closely related to the changing social status of writers in Hong Kong. According to Chen Pingyuan, May Fourth writers were "scornful of 'money worship'" because of not only "their loyalty to the literary cause, but also their relatively elevated social status" (126).

In Jiutu's case, he does not enjoy a same elitist social status (especially from an economic perspective), and thus he has to emphasize his commitment to writing serious literature so as to justify his cultural elitism. This approach is similar to Mason's/Richard's anxiety over his status in Hong Kong, which he has to secure through writing/painting. However, the problem is that the definition of literature is always changing, so is the social status of writers. Now more than forty years has passed after Liu Yichang published *The*

*Drunkard*, popular and mass culture has become the trademark of Hong Kong culture<sup>65</sup>.

Following Zhang Ailing, who successfully combines “literati’s artistic dignity” 文人立場 藝術尊嚴 with “the tastes of masses” 大眾品味市民趣味 (357), pure literature finds a way to mix with popular literature in Hong Kong<sup>66</sup>. For contemporary writers, the boundaries between popular fictions and literature gradually fade. “Essayists are writing for the popular newspapers and mass media, more focusing on the marketization of writing” (Xu 350). On the other hand, popular fiction is also integrated into the literary realm in Hong Kong and Jin Yong’s canonization<sup>67</sup> is one of the many examples. The edition of *The Drunkard* that I analyze in this chapter is a 2000 reprint by the PLA Literature and Art Publishing House, which prints a series of one hundred excellent Chinese books in the twentieth century based on the choice of the editorial board. In the

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<sup>65</sup> How did popular and entertaining fictions become the mainstream culture in Hong Kong? According to Xu, the process was complicated and reasons multiple. The most important two reasons probably are, first local intellectuals wanted to maintain a cultural confidence against the British elitism; and secondly, they attempted to resist the revolutionary ideologies from the PRC and to preserve their own folk culture and daily value system (348).

<sup>66</sup> Xu argues that Zhang Ailing’s style has at least influenced contemporary Hong Kong writings in the following four aspects: the city as the subject matter, a combination of modern style with traditional Chinese language, tastes of the masses, and women’s perspectives. Pp. 357.

<sup>67</sup> Canonization of Jin Yong involves multiple factors in addition to the changing definitions of literature. John Christopher Hamm provides a comprehensive analysis of Jin Yong’s success and he concludes that there are at least three factors: the literary value of Jin Yong’s writings, Jin Yong’s media networks and publications strategies, and Jin Yong’s accumulating authority in the economic and cultural fields. See Hamm, “Canonizing the Popular: the Case of Jin Yong.”

foreword, the editors explain that the original list does not include *The Drunkard*.

However, due to copyright issues, Jin Yong's *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* (*Shediao yingxiong zhuan* 射雕英雄傳) and two other novels cannot be reprinted. Therefore, the editors add three novels that rank right after the top one hundred. *The Drunkard* is one among them (2). Liu Yichang in 1962 probably anticipated that *The Drunkard* would become a masterpiece in modern Chinese literature. But back then, he would never know that martial arts fictions would also become classics, not to mention that some of them even have higher ranks. Despite the multiple factors that contribute to the canonization of Jin Yong and his martial arts fictions, contemporary readers' acceptance of both *The Drunkard* and popular martial arts fictions testifies the heterogeneity of Hong Kong literature starting in the 1960s. Would then it be also possible for Jiutu to find his place between literature and commercialization, between high and low cultures, and between the fading away past and the encroaching Hong Kong reality?

### **Hong Kong: Whose City?**

Jiutu's world is split in two: the realistic world that he has to face every day and the illusionary one in his drunken world. Actually, to call his drunken world an illusionary one is not accurate because his memories of this world are his attempts to reconstruct the past that is long lost. In doing so, Jiutu wishes to reaffirm his Chineseness, which is gradually consumed by the Hong Kong culture. As Jiutu says, "I do not feel lonely

because I have alcohol. Alcohol is evidence, assuring my existence. Thus, I become satisfied and everything seems to be in harmony” (192). Alcohol gives Jiutu power and dizziness to continue his nostalgia for Shanghai, with all the images that he is familiar with. “Apricot blossom and misty rain...small row boat in river... sycamore trees on Xiafei Road...racquet ball stadium...roast piglets...middle-aged Russian women” and many more are pieces of the collage that Jiutu recalls about Shanghai (193). But these pleasant images are mere sugar coats of his traumatic memories of Shanghai. Alcohol became Jiutu’s best friend when he was in Shanghai. A dance girl who mesmerized him, introduced Jiutu to the drunken world. While she herself jumped out of this illusionary world and married a rich cotton dealer, Jiutu was enmeshed in alcohol, which continued to remind him of the pleasant memories and the cruel reality.

Chapter four in *The Drunkard* is highly stylistic and lyrical. Every paragraph starts with the sentence “The wheels ceaselessly spin.” In this chapter, Jiutu recalls his life from his childhood to his arrival in Hong Kong. His personal experiences are intertwined with major events in Chinese history such as the Northern Expedition, the Japanese occupation, and the Civil War. As if his life is a ceaseless wheel, Jiutu migrates from Shanghai to Chongqing, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and finally back to Hong Kong. Most of his migrations are caused by wars. The ninth chapter in this novel reveals Jiutu’s traumatic memory about war. When he was six years old, he witnessed the beheading of a young soldier (38). When Japanese invasion started in 1931, Jiutu witnessed more people

dying in front of him. He even remembers a horrific image of “a man, whose head was bombed off, running on the road” (40). War brings all these tragedies and painful memories to Jiutu. The past is too distressing to go back and the present is too disgusting. The only way is to bury his consciousness in brandy.

This memory constantly haunts Jiutu but in my opinion, there is indication in the novel that it will disappear someday. In the novel Jiutu attempts to commit suicide when he loses his final two columns. He is saved by his old landlady Mrs. Lei, whose mind went crazy after losing her son in the Sino-Japanese War. Mrs. Lei mistakes Jiutu for her son and encourages him to live on. She even offers three thousand dollars to Jiutu, giving him a very short time of peace and soberness. He soon returns to his old state and becomes drunken again. In the dramatic ending, Jiutu shouts at Mrs. Lei, calling her “a crazy woman” and telling her that her son has died for long, leading to the suicide of Mrs. Lei (200). This dramatic ending is symbolic. Mrs. Lei is the last person that shows sympathy towards Jiutu and both of them are traumatized by the past. However, two persons who share similar trauma cannot save each other. Rather, they hurt each other by revealing the truth that they do not want to face: the past has passed. Mrs. Lei chooses to die but Jiutu does not even have the courage to make any change. That afternoon, he writes in his diary that “I would abstain from alcohol from now” but he takes “some glasses of brandy” that evening (201).

If both Jiutu and Mrs. Lei represent Chinese immigrants with a traumatic past, then

Sima Li is the representative of the new generation in Hong Kong. She is the daughter of Jiutu's former landlord. "Without any connection with the past; this seventeen-year old girl focused only on the present" (27). The characterization of this teenage girl is also symbolic. In my opinion, she represents the developing society of Hong Kong, which attracts Jiutu while at the same time threatens his existence. In the novel, Jiutu compares Sima Li to a poppy, "beautiful but poisonous" (55). Sima Li is poisonous because of her seemingly immoral behaviors. At the age of seventeen, she has already lost her innocence. She is addicted to alcohol and can drink "three glasses of brandy," and she even has had an abortion already (52). The falling of Sima Li once again, shows the detrimental effect of Hong Kong popular culture, which turns a simple girl to a fallen woman. Jiutu concludes that all her misbehaviors must come from "American films, or "the forty-cent novels" (52). The falling of Sima Li reminds Jiutu of his responsibility as a writer, whose "freedom to write martial arts fictions or forty-cent novels... would erode the social basis" (52). Meanwhile, Jiutu also sympathizes with Sima Li because he also falls from the literary realm and becomes a "literary prostitute" selling toxic words. Jiutu despises himself because similar to "a good housewife doing something immoral ... authors who wrote popular fictions would be excluded from the literary world. Authors who wrote popular fictions were like fallen women, who would never get rid of this stigma" (127-128). Therefore, Jiutu hates Sima Li, not only because she is a fallen woman, but also that she is the victim of the toxic literature and culture produced by



fallen authors like him. Her behaviors confirms the “literary crimes” that Jiutu and many other authors have committed. What is more troubling is that Sima Li is does not feel guilty of her fall and stigma while Jiutu cannot stop self-criticism.

Meanwhile, Jiutu also finds Sima Li attractive because she is energetic and audacious. More importantly, she has the freedom to enjoy the present life because she does not have a burdened past. For instance, “She is not against dancing twist; she is not against having ice cream in a theatre; she is not against walking on lovers’ road; she is not against people taking pictures of her sitting on the lions in front of HSBC (Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation); she is not against the omega hairstyle” (26). And she even dares to directly express her love towards middle-aged men such as Jiutu. There is a scene when Sima Li tries to seduce Jiutu, who refuses her and advises her to behave as a seventeen-year-old does. Sima Li laughs at his cowardice and considers his sense of morality totally outdated. In my opinion, Jiutu certainly has moral concerns, which prevent him to have sex with Sima Li. What is more compelling in this scene, however, is that Jiutu is afraid that his past and his Chineseness will be “consumed” by Sima Li and the popular culture that she represents. Representing the emerging culture in Hong Kong, Sima Li is energetic and lively, while Jiutu is powerless. The only strength that he can gather to resist Sima Li is to hold onto his past, hoping that his familiarity with the Chinese literary tradition would empower him to get rid of the new cultures, with which he is inevitably involved. This reluctance to let go his past and his inevitable involvement

in the new culture is the dilemma that Liu Yichang depicts for immigrant writers during the 1960s, when tradition was being challenged but continued to survive in the modernizing city of Hong Kong. A hybrid dressing code is common in Hong Kong where most men wear “a short Chinese-style jacket, pants, and leather shoes. Under the unbuttoned jacket is a white dress shirt and often times with a colorful tie with special patterns” (97). Accepting the hybrid dressing code is easy. However, it takes another decade for Jiutu to accept the coexistence of literature and popular fiction, as well as his Chineseness in Hong Kong.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I analyze the split worlds of Jiutu in Liu Yichang’s *The Drunkard*. Through the character Jiutu, Liu Yichang offers a vivid description of the dilemmas faced by early immigrant writers. On the one hand, they cannot abandon their elitism as Chinese intellectuals who wish to restore the cultural and literary glory that they used to enjoy back in China. On the other hand, the emergence of popular mass culture drastically challenges their literary ambitions and dignity as artistic writers. Whether there is a third world that can comprise the conflicts? Liu Yichang does not have an answer in *The Drunkard*. But maybe the two worlds of the past and the present are not all antagonistic. The old world as represented by Jiutu and the new as represented by Sima Li, would one day intersect, as we see in Liu Yichang’s 1972 novella *Tete-Beche*.

*Tete-Beche* can be read as a retelling of the story between Jiutu and Sima Li. The novella has two separate storylines, one dealing with the male protagonist Chunyu Bai and the other with the female protagonist Ah Xing. Both of them are on their way to see a film. The characterization of Chunyu Bai and Ah Xing resemble that we see in *The Drunkard*. Like Jiutu, Chunyu Bai is an immigrant writer, who is now in his fifties. Ah Xing is a native Hong Kong girl who is as energetic and audacious as Sima Li. Against these similar settings, there are two major changes, one of which is Chunyu Bai's self-perception and the other is the relationship between these two protagonists.

On his way to the cinema, Chunyu Bai hears the singing of Yao Surong, a Taiwanese diva, who reminds him of the Shanghainese singer Wu Yingyin. In contrast to Jiutu, Chunyu Bai is not overwhelmed by a nostalgic mood because "time changes. The era that Chunyubai misses has passed. Everything belonged to that period has gone. He can only retrieve his lost happiness in his memories, but happiness in memories is like a fading picture, vague and inauthentic." (19). Chunyu Bai's memory of Wu Yingyin is soon disrupted by other voices, including a boy's cry for ice cream and frozen yogurt, and a group of Shanghainese women who are passionately discussing the real estate market. The reality in Hong Kong dominates Chunyu Bai's mind while his past memories gradually disappear and become intangible.

Chunyu Bai meets Ah Xing in the cinema and their seats happen to be next to each other. Looking at Ah Xing, Chunyun Bai thinks of one female middle school classmate

and nothing more. Chunyu Bai has been too familiar with this image of a young Hong Kong woman, who is no longer described as a “poisonous poppy” as Sima Li is. While watching the film, Chunyu Bai is still uncomfortable with the pornographic scenes in the trailer, and the fact that such erotic message is open to all the audience including children. Nevertheless, watching a wedding scene reminds Chunyun Bai of his own wedding and he realizes that popular culture (such as this commercial film) might be vulgar but to some extent, they also represent the mundane moments, upon which human life is built. Indeed the actors and actress pretend to be happy when they get married, and Chunyu Bai had a similar performance when he got married, persuading the guests that he and his wife will have “a beautiful future” (33). That night after the film, Chunyu Bai dreams about having sex with Ah Xing. Her attractive and energetic body rejuvenates Chunyu Bai and he feels “his mind, feeling, and energy all return to the state when he was twenty years old” (40). The intersection between Chunyu Bai and Ah Xing could be read together with Jiutu’s refusal of Sima Li’s seduction. Eventually Chunyu Bai’s world is able to overlap with that of Ah Xing. We do not see bitter cries and poignant criticism when Liu Yichang depicts Chunyu Bai; instead, Liu Yichang is more interested in Chunyu Bai’s banal life, which provides another possibility for anyone such as Jiutu, who is trapped between their split worlds. For Jiutu, Chunyu Bai and many others, the 1970s Hong Kong witnessed a possibility to embrace their Chineseness and their Hong Kong identity, as well as their past and their present.

## CONCLUSION

It is an embarrassing encounter. Shyly drooping her head, she was giving him a chance to get close. He did not have the courage. She turned around, and left. That era has gone. Everything belonged to that period disappeared.

Those past years, as if covered underneath dusty glass, are visible but intangible. He has always been commemorating the past. If he could break the dusty glass, he would have returned to the past.

那是種難堪的相對。她一直羞低著頭，給他一個接近的機會。他沒有勇氣接近。她掉轉身，走了。

那個時代已過去。屬於那個時代的一切都不存在了。

那些消逝了的歲月，仿佛隔著一塊積著灰塵的玻璃，看得到，抓不著。他一直在懷念著過去的一切。如果他能衝破那塊積著灰塵的玻璃，他會走回早已消逝的歲月。

-Liu Yichang *Tête-bêche*

The above three lines also appeared in Wong Kar-wai's 2000 film *In the Mood for Love* 花樣年華. Wong expressed his gratitude towards Liu Yichang and especially the novella *Tête-bêche*, which inspired him to make the film. Wong writes "Tête-bêche could even mean a staggered moment. A novel published in 1972 and a film released in 2000, intertwine into a story about the 1960s" (qtd in *Tête-bêche* 2). From this perspective, Wong's film could be read as his attempt to break the "dusty glass" to reconstruct the 1960's Hong Kong. Anyone who has watched this film might not neglect the dazzling qipao 旗袍 that Maggie Cheung wears. This typical Chinese dress not only highlights

Cheung's femininity, but also embellishes the film with a nostalgic tone that frequently associates Hong Kong with Shanghai. Similar nostalgia is also visible in Liu Yichang's novels. What is different though, is that the westernizing Hong Kong during the 1960s, which forces Liu Yichang to commemorate his life in Shanghai, becomes a past that Wong Kar-wai wants to uncover. Therefore, even though Wong's film is said to have been influenced by Liu's 1972 novella, their understanding of Hong Kong in 1960s is not necessarily identical. These evolving interpretations of Hong Kong under different historical contexts are exactly the concentration of my dissertation.

What is Hong Kong identity, and who are Hong Kong people are questions that have always bothered people who are connected to this island. Even though there are no standard answers, I do see constant attempts of expatriates, immigrants, and local residents, who try to find their niche in Hong Kong. In this dissertation, I focus specifically on the postwar period because the cold war mindset and the antagonistic thinking that emerged during this time period have continued to influence cultural presentations and scholarly interpretations, especially in Asia. The reason why the Cold War has a widespread influence on Asia, according to Kuan-Hsing Chen is that in Asia, "decolonization and deimperialization movements in the period immediately after the Second World War were interrupted by the formation of a cold-war structure" (4). Chen further argues that we need to rethink about Asia in a movement of what he calls "de-cold war" in juxtaposition with decolonization and deimperialization since all three

movements are interwoven under the same historical process. In a similar way, my focus on Hong Kong novels written in the cold war period aims to untangle the mechanisms of colonialism, nationalism, capitalism, which in one way or another, influence our understanding of locality in Hong Kong.

This dissertation examines four different novels, which display the multiple ways to negotiate Chineseness in postwar Hong Kong. Due to political, economic, and geographic specialties, postwar Hong Kong became the place where a great many writers with different social backgrounds settled. An exploration of how these authors, regardless of their ethnicities, genders, and social statuses, construct their new subjectivities, reveals the fact that the Hong Kong locality, which involves a negotiation of Chineseness in Hong Kong, is always already fluid. In this dissertation, I analyze how western expatriates such as Richard Mason views Chineseness as a tool to maintain his privileges as a sympathetic appreciator. For Eurasian writer Han Suyin, her interpretation of Chineseness in the fast-changing period after WWII makes it possible for her to find a balance between her Chinese world and her Western world. My last two chapters analyze the ways in which Chinese literary tradition both supports and troubles intellectuals in Hong Kong. Lü Lun for instance, believes in a unification of the refugees, an approach that is inspired by socialist realism. Meanwhile, his optimism also lays the foundation for the Hong Kong Dream starting in the 1960s. Liu Yichang likewise is bothered by the commercialization of literature and the increasing economic gap between different social

classes in Hong Kong. His novel emphasizes his insistence on the May Fourth literary tradition and at the same time foresees the emergence of a local culture.

By focusing on these four novels which were written between 1945 and 1966, my dissertation also complicates our understanding of the Hong Kong identity and Hong Kong locality. It is generally regarded that the Hong Kong identity did not come into being until the 1970s, when Hong Kong's connection with China was severed. My analysis of these four novels, however shows that earlier consciousness of a Hong Kong identity, already existed in the 1950s and 1960s. The representations of Hong Kong as a hybrid city where East meets West, a city that promises change and opportunity, and a city where elite culture coexists with popular culture, prove to be some of the well-acknowledged images of the cosmopolitan Hong Kong after the 1970s. Meanwhile, different authors' representations of the postwar Hong Kong reveal the fact that the Hong Kong locality is closely related to the position of Hong Kong between Britain and China during specific historical period. The two decades after WWII in Hong Kong witnessed transient moments as a result of its changing positions between Britain and China. These transient moments made it possible for people to rethink about the city and their places in Hong Kong. From this perspective, the "dis-appearing" Hong Kong existed long before the 1980s.

Currently, literary studies about novels written during this period have been restricted by ideologies, languages, and essentialistic interpretations of the Hong Kong identity.



Most studies on Hong Kong literature emphasize the languages, with which the literary pieces are written. A similar emphasis is placed on the ethnicities of authors, namely, Hong Kong authors have to be native Hongkongers or people who have stayed in Hong Kong for a long period. These standards certainly contribute to the development of local literary creation and literary criticism in Hong Kong. At the same time, however, sticking to these rigid standards also results in a neglect of certain writings about Hong Kong. My dissertation calls into question the concept of Hong Kong novels and Hong Kong locality from a literary perspective. In this dissertation, I include novels written in English and Chinese by both male authors and female authors. Among them, there are British expatriates, Eurasians, and Chinese, and their ideological approaches also vary. To me, it is necessary to juxtapose these novels in order to have a comprehensive understanding of Hong Kong locality in 1950s, namely, the different imaginations of Hong Kong as somewhere between Britain and China. My selection of the four authors in this dissertation is my contribution to the on-going debate on Hong Kong literature. In my opinion, whether a piece of writing is Hong Kong literature depends not on its language and authorship, but rather on the extent to which it reflects the process during which people in Hong Kong negotiate their subjectivities.

When I first started this dissertation in 2013, I did not expect that there would be escalating clashes between Hong Kong and mainland China. During my studies in Hong Kong from 2008 to 2010, I enjoyed Hong Kong's openness to different cultures. Even

though my Cantonese was heavily accented, most my Hong Kong friends did not consider me an outsider. I still remember in 2008 after the Beijing Olympics, a delegation of famous Chinese athletes visited Hong Kong and received warm welcome. I was in the Ocean Park the day when these athletes visited it, and I saw how proud the local residents were for being Chinese. Maybe to many Hongkongers, the question about whether they are Hongkongers or mainlanders temporarily disappeared at that specific moment. Things have changed drastically in recent years. I went back to Hong Kong in July 2013 to conduct research and one day on the bus, I noticed a sticker on the seat saying “Locusts, go back to China” (蝗虫滾回中國去). This slogan was of course radical and irrational but as a literary critic, I began to think about the identity anxieties in Hong Kong. Even though none of us lives in a homogeneous community, identity is a concept that we do not often think about in our daily lives. For contemporary Hongkongers, however, their anxieties lie exactly in their multiple identities. Therefore, when facing mainland tourists, and especially smugglers, Hong Kong people would highlight their identity differences. At other times, when the Chinese nation becomes the focus of the world—such as during the Sichuan earthquake, or the Beijing Olympics—local residents also share the imagined community of China. The coexistence of these different mentalities and the multiple identities for Hong Kong people, in my opinion, together contribute to the development of Hong Kong into a hybrid society. Anyone who has been to Hong Kong probably would not neglect the Chinese elements in this westernized city. People combine English and

Cantonese in their daily conversations, drink Yuanyang 鴛鴦 (a special drink that mixes coffee with tea), and celebrate both traditional Chinese holidays and Western holidays. This type of mixedness has become a hallmark of the Hong Kong society.

It is understandable why currently people in Hong Kong are concerned about their identities, yet repelling the Chineseness in this society is impossible and is a reductive solution to their current identity anxieties. Offering any feasible political or economic policies is beyond my expertise, but negotiating a new subjectivity is always possible. Returning to the postwar period and reading how people tried to soothe their identity anxieties might give us some clues about the intertwining relationship between mainland China and Hong Kong and the possibility to reinterpret Chineseness and Hong Kong locality. To label something as essentially Chinese or Hongkongnese not only reduces the complexity of the Hong Kong identities, but also neglects the fact that Chineseness is constantly involved in the negotiations of such identities.

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