# *Representing Hong Kong in a Borrowed Tongue*

## *The Cultural Identity Crisis in Anglophone Hong Kong Literature*

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of
The University of Liverpool for the degree of
Doctor in Philosophy

CATHERINE YUEN WING WONG

March 2008

# ABSTRACT

A.L. McLeod's comment on the literature of Hong Kong, a former Commonwealth colony of Britain, represents the consensus that Hong Kong has "produced *no* literature". Also pertinent is his view that Hong Kong has "no sense of national identity, no cause to follow, no common goal". The Handover in 1997 represented a new era for Hong Kong as it came under a new sovereign with a new identity. It is now time to rethink the relevance of McLeod's assertion, made some four decades ago. Hong Kong has long been regarded as a "cultural desert", which is not a favorable environment to create any impetus to cultivate development in culture and arts. However, following reunification with China, Hong Kong is now permeated by a Chinese national identity that is less ambiguous and more legitimate than its former colonial counterpart. Decolonisation has, without a shadow of doubt, provided all Hongkongers with a "common goal" to anticipate, inducing them to question whether recent history has given Hong Kong a new identity; and, whether there are incentives for claiming it. However, the key question is whether present day Hong Kong has given inspiration and "calligraphic ink" for Hong Kong literature; in particular, how Hong Kong's new identity has been reflected in literary works.

This research relates postcolonial thinking to literature emanating from Hong Kong, its thrust is to dissect and explore the implicit meanings evident in the use of the English language by native Hong Kong writers as they expound the identity of Hong Kong. Does Anglophone writing in these instances express the identity of Hong Kong?

Addressing the writings of Hong Kong native Xu Xi (writer of *Hong*

*Kong Rose*), Agnes Lam (*Woman to Woman and Other Poems*) and Louise Ho (*New Ends, Old Beginnings*), the research also considers how such adaptations result collaterally in cultural displacements, diasporic experience and a linguistic identity crisis, which leads to the consideration of whether a uniquely Hong Kong cultural identity may be said to emerge *ex post facto* from the postcolonial situation, or whether a hybrid identity existed prior to the political upheaval of 1997.

The earlier part of the thesis focuses on the investigation of subjects' nostalgic feelings towards their past. Chapter one provides a general overview of the political situation of Hong Kong that gave rise to a special cultural phenomenon which this thesis examines: the special nostalgia in Hong Kong's memory is due to its unique political situation. It discusses the presentation and the perspective on time taken by the three writers. Identifying Xu Xi as idealistic, Agnes Lam as individualistic and Louise Ho as skeptical, this thesis further consider how these different writers deal with the postcolonial experiences of their time in the perception and construction of their identity.

One of the major focuses of this thesis is the notion of a postcolonial time sense, that is, the perplexing competition between the time and memory of the coloniser and that of the colonised. The focus of this research then turns to language. Pursuing the idea that language creates a voice and an identity, this thesis considers how these three writers deal with the various languages current in Hong Kong and their opinion on languages which empower and disempower them. The capacity of language to marginalise is one of the focuses of discussion. The study of marginal identity will be revisited in the last chapter and the angle will change to bring into view the marginality that is brought about by space.

Another primary area of analysis in this thesis is postcolonial geography. Following on from the discussion of nostalgia, the analysis of this feeling of inertia will extend from time to space and in an examination of the significance of "homeland" in these postcolonial works. In its conclusion, the thesis explores the procedures which these writers have adopted in constructing a postcolonial identity for Hong Kong by examining their dealings with the displacement brought by migration, colonisation and globalisation, together with the attempted transcendence of physical distance and psychological boundaries.

# CONTENTS


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION 6

CHAPTER ONE
*From Colonial to Post-colonial* 12

CHAPTER TWO
*Representing Hong Kong – Literature of Hong Kong* 53

CHAPTER THREE
*Postcolonial Writings of the Last Bastion of Colonialism – the Anglophile Inertia* 110

CHAPTER FOUR
*Moving from Gender Roles to the Epiphany of Hong Kong Identity* 171

CHAPTER FIVE
*'Geeleegulu': Localisation, Globalisation, or Language Confusion* 194

CONCLUSION
*Towards Postcolonial Identity* 239

APENDIX ONE
*Email Correspondence with Xu Xi* 248

APENDIX TWO
*Interview* 254

APENDIX THREE
*The Perplexing Linguistic Identity of Hong Kong* 270

BIBLIOGRAPHY 274

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr Nick Davis for his careful judgement and unsparingly insightful supervision. The assistance of Dr Carolyn Burdett, Dr Jill Rudd and Dr Faye Hammill has also been greatly appreciated. I dedicate this thesis to my family as a gesture of thanks for their sacrifices and love.

# INTRODUCTION

> The genesis of a local literature in the Commonwealth countries has almost always been contemporaneous with the development of a truly nationalist sentiment: the larger British colonies such as Fiji, Hong Kong and Malta, where there are relatively large English-speaking populations, have produced no literature, even in the broadest sense of the term. The reason probably lies in the fact that they have, as yet, no sense of national identity, no cause to follow, no common goal.[1]

A.L. McLeod's comment on ex-Commonwealth Hong Kong's literature represents the general opinion towards Hong Kong that, firstly, this ex-colony of Britain has "produced *no* literature" and that, more importantly, it has "no sense of national identity, no cause to follow, no common goal". The Handover in 1997 has brought Hong Kong into a new era with a new sovereignty and a new identity. It is time to rethink the relevance of McLeod's judgment made more than four decades ago. Hong Kong has long been regarded as a "cultural desert" which provides neither a favorable environment for nor the demand to cultivate any cultural and artistic development. However, with the reunion with China, Hong Kong is being provided with a Chinese national identity, less ambiguous and more legitimate than its former colonial one. The decolonization issue has surely provided all Hongkongers with a "common goal" to anticipate. So, can these recent changes, the newly given identity, the lately claimed sense of purpose, not long attached root and freshly set goal provide some

---

[1] A.L. McLeod (ed.), *The Commonwealth Pen: An Introduction to the Literature of the British Commonwealth*, Cornell, 1961, p.8.

inspiration and materials for Hong Kong literature? And how are they being presented in these literary works.

The issue of 1997 and the handover of sovereignty of Hong Kong brought the prosperous city under the spotlight of the political world. The world was keen to witness the historical moment of the decolonization of one of the last bastions of British colonialism. Not only was the world interested in knowing the effect of colonialism on the territory, but the public was also curious about the fate of the ex-colony under communist rule in the postcolonial era. The decolonization has awakened Hong Kong people's self-awareness. The event has caused them to rethink their identity and question their sentiments towards the colonizer, the system and their future sovereign.

Even though Hong Kong is one of the last decolonizing colonies in the postcolonial era, there is no predecessor that has experienced the same situation that Hong Kong is facing in decolonization. From the case of the United States to that of India, the decolonization of the colony comes simultaneously with its independence. In fact, the term "independence" is commonly used as a synonym for the decolonization of a colony. But surprisingly, Hong Kong did not play any part, and was as a matter of fact excluded from the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the question of Hong Kong in 1984. The future and the decolonization of the city was discussed, decided and manipulated by the two sovereign powers and the right of self-determination of Hong Kong was overlooked and exploited. What is more, the solution to the question and the decision made in the convention about the decolonization of the colony was merely the handover of sovereignty from the British to communist China. "One Country, Two Systems", the

fundamental principle of the Basic Law, the constitution of Hong Kong after 1997 and the guarantee of "socialist system and policies shall not be practised in the HKSAR, and the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years" seemed to be a reassurance given by the Communist Chinese government to Hong Kong. In reality, however, it is exactly where the irony and the problem of the whole decolonizing process of the colony lies. The "promise" made by the PRC government allows the preservation of the British colonial bureaucracy. Without the elimination of the British system and officialdom, the spirit of colonialism remains even after the decolonization. At the same time, one may argue that the handover never brought an end to the colonization of Hong Kong. It is a change of the sovereignty, of the government but not of the governing mode and system. The removal from British colonial rule marks the beginning of another stage of colonization for Hong Kong. So, is Hong Kong postcolonial? Has colonialism ever ended in this territory? Is communist China's exercise of sovereignty another form of colonization for Hong Kong?

At the same time, the colony experienced several social and political events during the last few decades of the British colonial rule which further problematized its decolonization. The Riots in 1967[2] were one of the first and most important anti-social and anti-governmental events in Hong Kong during the 99 years of British colonial governance. It mobilised the first

[2] The Riots was first a pro-communist movement organized by the labor unions in Hong Kong against the Nationalists (KMT) and to support the Chinese Communist Party but it was later developed into the extreme leftist anti-government, anti-capitalist and anti-colonial riots. Rebels set up both real and fraud bombs in buildings of Nationalist inhabitants, near governmental offices and embassy areas. Many civilians and expatriates were killed during that time. It was once out of control and the government had to impose a curfew.

implantation of anti-colonial sentiments, fear of communism in Hong Kong, and an awakening of the social consciousness and identity in the community. And the Tiananmen Square Incident on 4th June 1989 more violently and thoroughly awakened Hongkongers, unsettling the ambiguous identity imposed on them by politics which they had accepted without questioning. The political tragedy shocked Hongkongers and confirmed their mistrust of Communist China.

The purpose of this research is to study the presentation of the decolonization of Hong Kong and the description of Hong Kong colonial identity and reconstruction of its postcolonial identity in the literary works of three female Hong Kong writers: XuXi, Agnes Lam and Louise Ho. While the media and genres adopted by the three writers are different, the career base and the identity they choose also vary. Xu Xi resides in New York, Hong Kong and New Zealand and has gained her fame as a Hong Kong writer internationally. But instead of remaining satisfied with her international reputation and cosmopolitan image, Xu Xi has actively worked on building up a local image for herself and her work. By contrast, Louise Ho is renowned as a local poet. She attempts to resolve the conflict between her multicultural experience and her identity as a local writer by creating a deterritorialized identity for her poems. Agnes Lam serves as the bridge between the two extreme identities of Xu Xi and Louise Ho. Agnes Lam is a regional poet, warmly welcomed by both the audience of Hong Kong and Singapore. The style of these writings reflects the writers' view of the decolonization of their city, the identity crisis that they experience in the period of political transformation and cultural clashes. The whole research will focus on Hongkongers' struggle and search for an identity

within their marginality created by multi-cultures, political issues, migration, nationalism in Hong Kong. Each of the following chapters will be devoted to analysis of different aspects of attachment to the cultural past and perception of postcolonial identity, along with political and cultural changes at the personal, social, political levels, and viewed in elitist, grassroots and intellectual perspectives in the three writers' works.

The first chapter offers a general discussion of ideologies and theories. It sketches an account of colonial history and the significant effects of colonization on the colonized, especially in the case of Hong Kong. A critical analysis of postcolonial theory and its application in the unique situation of Hong Kong will also be offered in the chapter. The chapter builds up a theoretical base for the ensuing study of Hong Kong literature.

The second chapter will move on to the discussion of the classification of Anglophone Hong Kong literature. And the third to the fifth chapters of this thesis will be devoted to the analysis of Xu Xi's, Agnes Lam's and Louise Ho's works respectively, and the discussion will focus on the three major themes of postcolonial time, space and language as presented and discussed in these three Anglophone writers' works. The postcolonial time sense is perplexing as there is the competition between the time and memory of the colonizer and that of the colonized. And it is further complicated due to the colonized subjects' nostalgic feelings towards their past. The chapter will investigate the special nostalgia in Hong Kong's memory due to its unique political situation. It will further discuss the presentation and the perspective of time of the three writers. Given that Xu Xi is idealistic, Agnes Lam individualist and Louise Ho skeptical of both these positions, the thesis will examine the different writers' dealings with

the postcolonial experience of time in the perception and construction of their identity.

The focus will shift from time and language in the latter part of this thesis. Taking up the idea that language creates a voice and an identity, this chapter explores ways in which the three writers deal with various languages prevailing in Hong Kong and the opinions they hold on languages as empowering and disempowering them. The perception that language is the source of marginality is one of the focuses of this chapter. The study of marginal identity will be continued in the last chapter, and the angle will change to take in the marginality that is brought about by space. This primary area of analysis of this chapter is on postcolonial geography. Continuing the discussion of nostalgia, the analysis of this feeling of inertia will extend from time to space, in examination of the significance of "homeland" in these postcolonial works. I shall examine these writers' dealings with the displacement brought by migration, colonization and globalization, and the ways in which they overcome physical distance and transcend psychological boundaries. Considering the many adjustments and reconciliations made, the chapter will move to a conclusion by reconsidering the methods which these writers have adopted in constructing a postcolonial identity for Hong Kong: ranging from an idealized, allegorical one in XuXi's works to a local, regional one in Agnes Lam's to Louise Ho's deterritorialised hybridity.

# CHAPTER ONE

## *From Colonial to Post-colonial*

### I. Imperialism and Colonialism

> The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea, and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to.[3]

Joseph Conrad offers brutal yet accurate observation of the eighteenth and nineteenth century European imperialist ideals and colonisation in his novel *The Heart of Darkness*. Nowadays, at the height of decolonisation and the post-colonial era, the terms imperialism and colonialism seem to have become synonyms. They are often used interchangeably. However, scholars and theorists generally agree, regardless of their variance in definitions, that imperialism is an ideological concept rationalizing and legitimatizing the national expansion of an empire over countries/regions whereas colonialism is one way of putting the ideology into practice. Robert Young, in his book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, quoted Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in distinguishing the difference between the ideology of imperialism and colonialism in real practice in the harsh reality. Imperialism, in fact, can be classified as belonging to two major forms, deriving from ancient Roman and Ottoman models, and the modern imperialism which was started by Spain, spread further within Europe, and reached its height in the nineteenth century. This research will

---

[3] Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism,* ed. Paul B. Armstrong, (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 2005), p. 67.

focus mainly on modern imperialism. Imperialism is always associated with empire, and might be seen as an ideology for an empire's quest and exercise of its political and economic influence over its dependencies. Young explores the evolution of the ideology and claims that imperialism is at first a notion describing "a political system of actual conquest and occupation."[4] It later developed into the model of British imperialism in the late nineteenth century which furthered economic interests through the establishment of political domination in the colonies. The setting up of the East India Company is the best example of the British mode of colonisation. Instead of stressing geographical occupation, the British Empire claimed trade and exploration of new overseas markets as the major objective of their overseas expeditions. American imperialism in the twentieth century emphasized economic rather than political domination. In short, imperialism is

> [c]haracterized by the exercise of power either through direct conquest or (latterly) through political and economic influence that effectively amounts to be a similar form of domination: both involves the practice of power through facilitating institutions and ideologies. Typically, it is the deliberate product of a political machine that rules from the centre, and extends its control to the furthest reaches of the peripheries.[5]

No matter what the reason is behind its imperialistic expansion, nationalism and the demonstration of the empire's glory, the spreading and preaching of Christian faith to the third world, exploring overseas markets for economic expansion, searching for new land to accommodate the

[4] Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, (Oxford : Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p.26.
[5] Robert Young, *Postcolonialism*, p. 27.

expanding local population, the chief principle of an imperialist ideology is to establish a system for the assertion of power and influence and extraction of political and economic benefits from an overseas territory in order to benefit the home country. John McLeod summarizes imperialism in an even more straightforward way as "an ideological concept which upholds the legitimacy of the economic and military control of one nation by another,"[6] while he simply defines colonialism as "only one form of practice which results from the ideology of imperialism, and specifically concerns the settlement of one group of people in a new location"[7]. In other words, colonialism is the settlement and establishment of institutions, systems, laws of the empire on its conquered land so as to allow the empire to exercise its political and economic influence, and impose the imperialist ideology on the territory.

While Robert Young gives a general eco-political ideological overview of imperialism, and John McLeod tries to make a clear distinction between the two terms, Ania Loomba in her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, gives an analysis of the historical evolution of colonialism. McLeod has taken a more descriptive approach in presenting the concept colonialism and the role it plays in the political engine of Western imperial powers; Loomba on the other hand takes up a more critical perspective in analyzing this romanticized western notion and the problem it has created in reality. The author quotes from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) so as to reveal how the imperial powers overlook and try to hide the problems which colonisation creates. In the

---

[6] John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 7.
[7] Loc. cit.

*OED*, colonialism is derived from Latin word *colonia* which meant "farm" or "settlement":

> A settlement in a new country…a body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a community subject to or connected with their parent state; the community so formed, consisting of the original settlers and their descendants and successors, as long as the connection with the parent state is kept up.[8]

Loomba points out that this partial picture of colonialism presented by the definition obviously tries to avoid mention of the problem of conflict with the indigenous inhabitants when the settlers arrived in the new country and established a colony there.[9] No matter how hard colonialists try to justify their territorial expansion and understate the effect of it on the colonies by the introduction of a Eurocentric definition of the notion of colonialism, the intrusion into the local community is evident and disharmony is caused. At the same time, the definition also reveals the fact that the colonial governments tend to overlook the indigenous inhabitants' grievances towards the occupation. The unequal treatment of the new and old settlers and the negligence and disrespect for the existing social norms and cultural practices in the local community of the new world awaken a sense of identity and unity amongst the indigenous inhabitants. Indeed, it is due to these conflicts that the anti-colonial feelings amongst the colonised subjects arise.

Yet, as Robert Young observes, the type of colonialism that Britain has adopted is far more sophisticated than the above-stated definition. British colonial government seems to have adopted a more flexible approach in

---

[8] The Oxford English Dictionary Vol III, p. 495

[9] Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, (London: Routledge, 1998). pp1-3.

tackling its colonies, which vary with their nature and the races of their inhabitants: "Just as it had had two different kinds of colony, so Britain had two imperial systems: not differentiated by form of settlement or trade as in the early colonial days, but by the race of the settled inhabitants"[10]. It was due to the American War of Independence in 1781 and the Rising in India in 1857 that Britain changed its imperial policy; they led to the co-existence of the systems of the federation of self-governing Anglo Saxon dominations made up of settlers of the same race, and that of the "dependencies" where rule was exercised over a subject race. Hong Kong fell into the category of one of the "dependencies" of Britain in its imperial policy. Hence, socially, the colony was not treated as a place for the resettlement of British subjects from the mainland and the majority of the inhabitants in Hong Kong remained Chinese. At the same time, politically, Britain exercised a firm centralized control over this colony. Self-government had not been introduced to Hong Kong prior to the last decade of colonial rule and the institutions of the imperial government were imposed and a governor from Britain was appointed by the coloniser.

The colonial policy of Britain towards Hong Kong established a successful system of political control: there had been little radical discontent over the colonial rule during 99 years of British governance. Hong Kong, one of the crown colonies of Britain at the height of British imperial expansion, remained its colony for a century and was amongst the last mainstays of colonialism in the Post World War II era of postcolonialism and decolonisation. Due to the imperial policy applied by Britain to its dependencies, the primary interest of the coloniser on Hong

[10] Robert Young, *Postcolonialism*, p.35.

Kong was an economic one; and, hence, it gave Hong Kong plenty of freedom and provided it with a favourable condition for its economic development. In her article "Governing Post-Colonial Hong Kong: Institutional Incongruity, Governance Crisis, and Authoritarianism", Eliza W. Y. Lee points out that the colonial state adopted bureaucratic dominance over its Asian colony. Socio-politically, it succeeded in maintaining a low level of political awareness among the general public, which proved to enhance colonial domination; economically, the colonial British government implemented low taxation and a high level of positive nonintervention policy, as a result of which freedom in economic activities allowed the economy of the colony to boom. All these contributed to the minimal resistance against colonial rule in Hong Kong. While British policy played a part in the stability of its rule, sociologist Lau Siu-kai observed that the special historical background of Hong Kong and the nature of its inhabitants also played a crucial role in its peace. He points to

> [...] the existence of a set of political-administrative institutions which have been operating quite effectively for more than one and a half centuries. These institutions have been imposed upon the Chinese community of Hong Kong by the British colonisers. While these institutions were not rooted in the Chinese community, they were basically in place prior to the formation of the latter as a result of the immigration of Chinese into Hong Kong. These institutions enjoy a high level of acceptance and support by the Hong Kong Chinese and they play an indispensable role in maintaining stability in the current turbulent period in Hong Kong's history.[11]

---

[11] Lau Siu-kai, "Institutions Without Leaders: The Hong Kong Chinese View of Political Leadership" 191-2 in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 63, NO.2 (Summer, 1990), 191-209. "and the current turbulent period in Hong Kong's history" is referring to June 4th Incident taken

Indeed, there was only one major episode of social disorder in the colonial history of Hong Kong in 1967; and the 1967 Riots were more a Communist movement than an anti-governmental and anti-colonial campaign. The efficiency of the governmental institutions saved Hong Kong from political turmoil and provided the colony with a stable social environment to develop its economy.

The colonial era and the British colonial governance of Hong Kong was peaceful and smooth, Ironically, China, holding the new sovereignty over Hong Kong after the handover, did not hold very optimistic expectations concerning decolonisation and post-colonial rule over the city. British colonial rule facilitated the rapid economic development of the colony. But the most important things that the colonial rule introduced to Hong Kong were the economic mode of production and political system: capitalism and the democracy. The establishment of the capitalist system in Hong Kong posed a hindrance to China's re-exercising of sovereignty over the decolonising city, and a problematic situation to CCP leaders as capitalism is the theoretical enemy of Communism. While capitalist values might be relatively bearable, with the Chinese government's adopting of its unique "Socialist Market Economy" to collaborate with its *Open Door Policy*, the introduction of democracy still contradicts and threatens the ruling principles of Communist China.[12]

place in 1989, one year before this article was published.

[12] After the death of Mao Zedong in September 1976 and the fall of Gang of Four following this death, Deng Xiaoping rose back to power and immediately repudiated the Cultural Revolution. One of his first agendas was to rebuild China's society and economy after it suffered from 10-year's long excessive and extreme revolutionary political movements. In foreign policy, Deng reopened China so as to redevelop political and economic relationship with the world. This policy brought about the US's breaking of diplomatic relationship with Republic of China (Taiwan) and establishment of that with PRC. This marked a significant advancement of Communist China in the world as it gained the recognition of both its de facto and de jure power as the sovereignty of China

The difference in political systems has surely set foreseeable obstacles to China in exercising its sovereignty over Hong Kong, and thus the Chinese Communist Party had to make political concessions and at the same time to guarantee to its future subjects the continuing stability and prosperity of the city. Such a concession was made by Deng Xiaoping in the form of a promise to the British government during the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 under which Britain agreed to return the sovereignty of Hong Kong back to the PRC. Dubbed "One Country, Two System", Deng's proposal was a confidence-booster that guaranteed a high degree of autonomy for Hong Kong and promised Communist China's non-intervention in Hong Kong's capitalist system for 50 years from 1997 when the 99-year-lease of New Territories expired. This has become the basis and founding principle of *Basic Law*, the constitution of Hong Kong after 1997.[13] The Chinese leadership believed that they had found a proper solution to the problem. The preservation of the capitalist system in Hong Kong on one hand could avoid the opposition of Hongkongers and conflicts in the governmental, political and social systems in the

---

instead of GMT (the Nationalist Party) by the world. This policy later also enhanced the solution of the Sino-British dispute over Hong Kong. And domestically, he launched a series of reforms called 'Four Modernizations' that aimed to turn China into a modernized and industrialized nation. In order to achieve his goal under the communist system, he created a new economic system which is called 'Socialist Market Economy'. This economic system, instead of upholding the Marxist and Leninist Communist Economic theory that 'production' is determined by central plan, suggests that production should be determined by the market. And the 'free market' mechanism is not only exclusive to capitalism and it is applicable and compatible to the production system which has a collective worker ownership nature. By adopting this system, Deng argued that socialism in China was at that time still in its primary stage and therefore the party has the responsibility to perfect 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'.

[13] Chapter One, Article 2 of *Basic Law* states that: The National People's Congress authorizes the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to exercise a high degree of autonomy and enjoy executive, legislative and independent judicial power, including that of final adjudication, in accordance with the provisions of this Law. And Article 5 of the same chapter reinforces the spirit of the whole constitution: The socialist system and policies shall not be practised in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years.

implementation of the Communist system in Hong Kong, and the 50 years' period of adjustment could give time for both systems to adjust to each other; and on the other hand, with the crucial role Hong Kong was playing in the world finance and economy, China would surely benefit and enjoy economic growth if Hong Kong maintained its capitalist system. At the same time, this policy was serving a more important purpose behind the scene; it was an experiment that the PRC used to set Hong Kong as a model and example paving way for Taiwan's reunification with China.[14]

However, British colonial policy in Hong Kong changed abruptly during the last period of its colonial governance, when it started to introduce democracy and direct elections to Hong Kong at both district and legislative levels during the governorship of Christopher Patten, the last governor of Hong Kong.[15] A series of reforms and drastic political changes was introduced to the local community in the so-called "Patten's package",[16] agressively so: it was "as if Hong Kong was rushing to make

[14] Hong Kong is actually the first test of the "One Country, Two Systems" experiment which was originally tailor-made for Taiwan for solving the "Taiwan issue". In the article "The Challenge of 1997 Hong Kong Handover for Taiwan" (*Pacific Affairs* Vol. 71. No. 4. Special Issue: Taiwan Strait, Winter 1999-2000, 555) Yun-han Chu points out that Beijing "to sweeten the package, had repeatedly promised that Taiwan would enjoy an even higher degree of autonomy. First, Taiwan could keep its own armed forces as long as they do not pose a threat to the mainland. Second, Beijing would reserve positions at the highest echelon of the national government for future government leaders of Taiwan. From Beijing's point of view, a smooth transition of Hong Kong from a British colony to a special administrative region under the PRC would be a great boost to its peaceful reunification campaign towards Taiwan."

[15] A parliamentary report issued by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC report) in March 1994 justified that British government's failure to introduce democracy to Hong Kong in its earlier period of governance was due to the fear of Chinese opposition and lack of popular demand by the Hong Kong people themselves.

[16] "Patten's Package" attempted to ensure an autonomous self-government and the preservation of the western model of direct and liberal democracy of Hong Kong after 1997. It aggressively introduced a series of drastic reforms and adjustments in the systems before the handover so as to safeguard Hong Kong from turning communist as Communist Chinese government promised "One Country, Two Systems" policy. In fact, the reform in 1994 aimed to introduce direct and indirect elections in both Legislative Council and the boards and all members are either directly or indirectly elected and it eliminated the seats of appointed member in the council and the boards in the system of 1992 reform which had been approved by the Chinese government. And Suzanne Pepper cited the result of a

up for lost political time."[17] No matter what the motive was behind this reform, whether it was because Britain was worried about its "place in history" according to local Hong Kong pundits, or because "the balance of world power and public opinion [had] shifted massively against China since the main agreements over Hong Kong's reversion were negotiated in the 1980s" as explained in the FAC report, China still speculated that it was "a conspiracy by Britain and the West to use Hong Kong as a base for subverting the communist regime and dismembering China."[18] The event brought further turmoil and conflict to the traditional Chinese political culture, and had an adverse effect on the communist Chinese government's attempt to exercise its sovereignty over the ex-colony.[19]

The incompatibility between two systems has been one of the major resistances to decolonisation and communist China's attempt to re-exercise its sovereignty over the territory. It makes China face a dilemma of its own creation in the "One Country, Two Systems" principle. The radical move to political reform in decolonising Hong Kong on the British side on the eve of handover no doubt threatened and even jeopardized China's future rule in Hong Kong. It therefore trapped China in an embarrassing situation.

---

public opinion poll conducted by the University of Hong Kong's Social Science Research Centre that just before the Legislative Council vote in June found that 90% of 600 respondents did not understand the reforms, making it meaningless to gauge support for them. Respondents did not even know the significance of a fully elected as opposed to a half-appointed legislature (*SCMP*, June 25, 1994).

[17] Suzanne Pepper, "Hong Kong in 1994: Democracy, Human Rights, and the Post-Colonial Political Order" in *Asian Survey*, Vol. 35, No. 1, A Survey of Asia in 1994: Part I (Jan., 1995), 46-60.

[18] Suzanne Pepper, "Hong Kong in 1994: Democracy, Human Rights, and the Post-Colonial Political Order". 49-52.

[19] Confucianism emphasizes hierarchy and filial piety. The traditional system of an extended family, that is the extending of the application of the familial system to the community and the state actually encourages the filial piety, respect and obedience of the subjects to the states, the authority. The introduction of a western democratic system which stresses equal opportunity and rights to participate in the politics has fundamentally shaken the whole traditional Chinese political system.

Such sudden and aggressive democratic reform empowered Hong Kong with a higher degree of autonomy than China would have wished; nonetheless, the Communist leaders had their hands tied as they could neither voice their opposition openly before the handover nor reverse the reform progress after 1997. The Communist leadership's open opposition to the reform would have simply exposed the Chinese authority to international criticism for altering the government agreement over Hong Kong, and thus violating and breaking its own confidence-boosting "one country, two systems" even before the handover. At the same time, China would be closely watched by the world and would be subjected to international pressure and speculation in any of their policy towards Hong Kong as the endorsement of *Basic Law* and its principles guards the CCP from intervening and reversing any of the political systems of Hong Kong which existed prior to the handover. Yet, this existence of a Western democratic system and ideology within Hong Kong not only created more tension in its rule over this piece of reclaimed territory, but also gave the Chinese authorities concern that this western democratic belief would spread to the rest of its territory, and as a result imperil and destabilize communist rule in the country.

## II. Nationalism and Decolonisation:

Nationalism plays a crucial role in Western historical and political development in the last two centuries. This Western ideology, originating in the late eighteenth century, electrified and spread quickly in the European continent and brought forth numerous political and territorial changes to the world. Nationalism is first an ethno-political ideology which sustains

the concept of national identity, the self-determination and unity of people who share the same race, culture and language. Nationalist thinking sparked the outbreak of a series of revolutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in both Europe and America. Nevertheless, it soon developed into patriotism and drove national expansion of European and American power in the latter half of the century. Competitive nationalism was one of the main driving forces behind European imperialism in Africa and Asia.

During the era of colonisation, nationalism was brought to and spread in colonised societies amongst other Western values, knowledge, ideological thinking and colonial institutions. Just as ideology played a role in the heightening of colonisation, nationalism played an important part in the downfall of colonialism and the decolonization of the European colonies in Africa and Asia. With a stronger sense of awareness of their national and cultural identity, the colonised natives could no longer accept and endure the humiliation of being colonised and dominated by foreign powers. Hence, anti-colonial sentiments grew while nationalist feelings prevailed.

However, nationalism is a Western ideology and it is not applicable to a city like Hong Kong where Chinese culture and traditions are deeply rooted and thus has played a minimal part in the decolonisation of the city. Firstly, Hong Kong has never been a nation: neither before nor during the colonial era was Hong Kong politically independent, exercising its autonomy. Secondly, the Chinese nationalism and political thinking that formed the basis of traditional Chinese philosophical thinking, i.e. primarily *Confucianism*, is primarily a moralization of subjects' total

submission to the power of the emperor, who is the embodiment of the state. The facts that Hong Kong had no say and subjectivity in the handover and, saddest of all, that its decolonisation was partly an experiment conducted by Communist China in the attempt to solve the Taiwan issue have been the focus of the research of many sociologists such as Suzanne Pepper and Lau Siu-Kai. Hong Kong has been always under the sovereignty of other nations. It was subjected to the power of Imperial Manchurian China before the colonisation and the colonial rule of Britain. And it would also be the future of Hong Kong after its decolonisation in 1997. Hence, the political atmosphere of Hong Kong does not encourage or even allow the development of such nationalist sentiments amongst its people. Rather, Hongkongers have to choose between these countries as places for them to attach their nationalist feelings. It seemed natural for Hong Kong people who were mostly ethnic Chinese to conform to Chinese nationalism. Hong Kong Chinese have tended to take up their Chinese nationalist feeling pragmatically. In the history of Hong Kong, there have been only a few cases where Hongkongers have developed a strong sense of nationalist feelings towards China. They all happened during the time when there was social instability, or when their economic and financial development could not console their psychological emptiness. The most notable incidents were the Hong Kong Riots in 1967 and the June 4th Incident in 1989. But as quickly as it arose, the passion cooled down almost immediately after the events.

The majority of inhabitants of Hong Kong were immigrants from China after the setting up of British colonial institutions made it easier for the colonial government to rule the colony; however, it is for the same

reason that China may find obstacles in the reunification. It is mainly because many of the Chinese immigrated to Hong Kong during the 1940s and 50s, running away from communist rule. Another obstacle comes from the pursuing of a political system and social life of Hong Kong that is very different from that of China. The attachment to the uniqueness of the place might generate some reluctance and negative feelings amongst Hongkongers towards the handover being imposed on them. Nonetheless, Lau Siu-kai points out in "Institutions Without Leaders: the Hong Kong Chinese View of Political leadership" that "traditional Chinese political culture depicts wise and benevolent leaders as the bedrock of a good political system. This emphasis on man rather than on the 'system' finds resonance among the Hong Kong Chinese"[20]. It explains the reason why nationalist feelings are not only discouraged by the authorities, but in fact felt to be unnecessary in Hong Kong. Nationalism together with other political theory and patriotism are only pragmatically adopted by Hongkongers in necessary situations: "[m]otivated primarily by economic aspirations, they are blatantly utilitarian in inclination and passionately apolitical or anti-political."[21]

Secondly, the submissive attitude to and dependence on the voluntary effort of the good leaders reveal the fact that, however westernized the society of Hong Kong is on the surface, Chinese culture, especially morality, still deeply influences the people of Hong Kong. As nationalism is a modern, Western concept, it is fairly alien to the ethnic Chinese

[20] Lau Siu-kai, "Institutions Without Leaders: The Hong Kong Chinese View of Political Leadership", 195 in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 63, NO.2 (Summer, 1990), 191-209.
[21] Lau Siu-kai, "Social Change, Bureaucratic Rule, and Emergent Political Issues in Hong Kong", 545 in *World Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Jul. 1983), 544-562.

community in Hong Kong. Moreover, there is no concept of nation and national identity in traditional Chinese culture. The traditional political culture and Confucian values reinforce utilitarianism and apolitical attitudes towards the state, and at the same time induce familial values, filial piety and respect and further extend it to society and the state. Thus, Chinese political values have already implanted hierarchical order and filial piety towards the emperors, the state leaders, in the minds of all Chinese.[22] Confucian teaching as modified in the Ming dynasty is the only notion found in Chinese philosophy that is similar to nationalist ideology. Nevertheless, in this ideology, the nation embodies the state, the dynasty and the emperor. It is merely the encouragement of loyalty to the emperor, and thus serves the purpose of consolidating the power of the state. The adopting of modern western ideology does not change the nature and the essence of Chinese politics. Nationalist ideology is primarily a political tool and a borrowed concept newly adopted in recent decades by the communist regime in China to consolidate its power. John Fitzgerald points out that the "nationalism" of Modern China is very different from the romantic nationalist ideology which prevailed in Europe and America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a matter of fact, nationalism barely exists in the country and the concept of "nation" is so ambivalent that it is to a large extent equivalent to the meaning of "state"[23]. Instead of

[22] Lau Siu-kai analyzes the political culture of Chinese especially those in Hong Kong in "Social Change, Bureaucratic Rule" comments that "Utilitarianism and instrumentalism not only influence relationships with outsiders, the government, and the society as a whole; they also tend to mould interpersonal relationships within the family, particularly toward those whose ties with the "core" members are not close, or those whose membership is achieved through fictive kinship. Utilitarian familism naturally forecloses extensive social involvement and political participation. The Chinese society on the whole is inward-looking and atomistic; it is composed of a multitude of family groups, each of which provides the locus for psychological identification and social interaction." (545)

[23] John Fitzgerald, "The Nationless State: the Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese

celebrating the singularity of the national self, nationalism in Modern China stresses the integrity of the state. Insofar as they are indoctrinated by the ideology of "the state builds the nation" embedded in Chinese culture, Chinese people lack the desire of active pursuit of independence and self-determination to form their own nation. So, in the case of the Chinese culture, nationalism virtually exists as the consolidation of state power.

Unaffected by the awakening of a sense of national identity, the colonised subjects in Hong Kong have not shown much resistance to the colonial rule of Britain. Indeed, the colonial government had tried to discourage the social awareness of its people in order to prevent the awakening of national sentiments. That makes a fundamental difference between the decolonisation of Hong Kong and that of other ex-colonies. As there is little nationalist feeling amongst the colonised subjects in Hong Kong, there is no driving force for the urge to independence or the end of the colonial rule. There has not been an obvious desire and quest for the end of colonial rule amongst Hongkongers. Unlike what occurred in many of the ex-colonies which gained their independence through a series of protests, the decolonisation of Hong Kong was imposed by the two sovereignties.

At the same time, the development of nationalist feelings towards its own territory seems to be inapplicable to the situation of Hong Kong in its decolonisation. Nationalism is a problematic concept as Hong Kong has never been a nation. At the same time, it is never encouraged as the concept advocates self-determination and independence which totally violate and

---

Nationalism", in *The Australian Journals of Chinese Affairs*, No. 33 (1995), 75-104 (p. 87).

contradict the wish for sovereignty of both the British and Chinese sides. Hence, the only legitimate nationalist sentiment which is encouraged is the one towards its remote and estranged motherland China and its future communist regime after the decolonisation. The problematic concepts of nation and nationalism in the Chinese tradition are therefore a political tool to serve the purpose and the wish of unification of the state power.

### III. Aftermath of the Decolonisation

The observation that Suzanne Pepper makes of the situation of Hong Kong is direct and striking:

> A true independence movement is still not possible and self-determination is therefore out of the question, institutions of genuine self-government cannot now be built, social or human rights legislation is long overdue, and communism exists only as remnant of its former self.[24]

The fate of Hong Kong after its decolonisation has been a topic of discussion for scholars and politicians. Without true independence, the status of Hong Kong as decolonised is merely de-jure rather than de-facto. Ghanaian leader, Kwame Nkrumah wrote in his book *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* that "the essence of neocolonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trapping of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus political policy is directed from outside."[25] His argument, though not completely applicable, suggests some rethinking of the situation of post-colonial Hong Kong. Hong Kong after 1997, though never granted

---

[24] Suzanne Pepper, 48.

[25] Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, (London: Heinemann, 1968), ix

its independence and self-determination, has been guaranteed a high degree of autonomy by *Basic Law*. Nevertheless, with its currency linked to that of the United States[26] and sovereignty vested in the PRC, Hong Kong has never been independent economically or even in the aspect of internal policy making. It is most legitimate to say that, as having the power of appointing principal leaders of the SAR government of Hong Kong controlled by China, the post-colonial government can never exercise its autonomy freely without self-censorship.[27] The government leaders are to be responsible to the CCP which appointed them instead of to the Hong Kong people when they are supposedly representing and ruling on their behalf. What is more, the elaboration in the *Basic Law* has actually undercut the effectiveness of the ambiguously phrased "high degree" of autonomy and the executive and legislative powers of HKSAR government. It legitimizes and materializes China's intervention in Hong Kong's autonomy by stating the rights of China to "return the law in

---

[26] Hong Kong's currency had been linked to that of the United States after the economic recession in 1974.

[27] Chapter II, Article 16-17 of the *Basic Law* grants Hong Kong SAR government its power and autonomy to exercise its legislative and executive powers: "the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall be vested with executive power. It shall on its own, conduct the administrative affairs of the Region in accordance with the relevant provisions of this Law." (Article 16) and "The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall be vested with legislative power. Laws enacted by the legislature of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region must be reported to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for the record. The reporting for record shall not affect the entry into force of such laws..." (Article 17). Yet, the rest of the law actually elaborates the conditions for such 'autonomy' and set limitations to it and it states that: "The Central People's Government shall appoint the Chief Executive and the principal officials of the executive authorities of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region..." (Article 15) and Article 17 in fact continues further elaboration that undermines its previous provision "... If the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, after consulting the Committee for the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under it, considers that any law enacted by the legislature of the Region is not in conformity with the provisions of this Law regarding affairs within the responsibility of the Central Authorities or regarding the relationship between the Central Authorities and the Region, the Standing Committee may return the law in question but shall not amend it. Any law returned by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress shall immediately be invalidated. This invalidation shall not have retroactive effect, unless otherwise provided for in the laws of the Region" (Article 17).

question" though it is not allowed to "amend" the law.[28] In this way, the policies and decisions by the principal government officials can never be executed and made without the speculation of the preference of the central government whereas the laws are to be made in the favor of CCP in order to be passed. With the economic system restrained by the US and the political system controlled by China, Hong Kong has moved into the era of Kwame Nkrumah's Neocolonialism of which independence and decolonisation is merely superficial and its "political policy is directed from outside."[29]

And in fact, if the definition of colonisation is the "settlements of subjects and institutions of the home country to the new land", the policies that China has been adopting on Hong Kong can be regarded as a form of "colonisation". Even though imperialism seems to have ended by the overthrowing of Imperial Qing government in 1911, China remains a coloniser. As with the rule of Britain over Ireland, many regions of ethnic minorities such as Tibet, Xianjiang, Qinghai etc are still under Han Chinese "Republican" rule.[30] The situation of Hong Kong may seem different from that of Tibet as the majority Hong Kong population, unlike that of Tibet, is not of non-Han ethnicity. Hong Kong is not a colony of China; yet the

---

[28] Ibid. Refer to Article 17.

[29] Refer to note 24.

[30] See Solomon M. Karmel, "Ethnic Tension and the Struggle for Order: China's policies in Tibet" in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 68, No.4 (Winter, 1995-6), 485-508. Even though Communist China has set up regional autonomous governments in these regions, the tension among Han Chinese immigrants and Han Chinese political and economic control remains strong. The tension is largely caused by cultural, religious and ethnic difference and Han Chinese's colonial policies of monopolizing their politics: "Tibetans have occupied the highest-level positions in the regional, prefectural, and village *governments* of Tibet, but not the highest-level positions in the Communist party or its Propaganda Department, the military, the armed police, and the public security forces. Official policy attracts 'qualified' candidates from elsewhere to work in Tibet, with Tibetans themselves regarded as technically or politically unqualified for a host of positions in the party, the government, the military, and public industry. It is now officially considered 'reactionary' to complain about the 'large-scale immigration' of Han cadres into Tibet.' (499-500)

situation in which Hong Kong has been alienated from China in terms of culture, social, economic and political systems makes the sudden imposition of the sovereignty of China on Hong Kong a foreign intrusion. China "colonised" Hong Kong by establishing its own institutions in the city. Ironically, under the "Greater China" principle, the CCP's policy on Hong Kong is identical to that on Tibet and Xianjiang. The same "One Country Two Systems" and regional autonomy policy that China uses to 'colonise' Tibet is applied to Hong Kong. Indeed, first and foremost in the act of colonisation is the implementation of the Chinese constituted *Basic Law* to the region. In it, the constitution actually empowers the sovereign state to settle its subjects and various institutions in Hong Kong legitimately under the disguise of safeguarding the autonomy of the city. The settling of the army in the Special Administrative Region is the best example of Hong Kong submitting its autonomy and yielding itself to the colonisation of China.[31] Hence, the 1997 Handover has only decolonised Hong Kong from British colonial rule, and postcolonial Hong Kong has emerged into a new stage and form of colonisation right at the moment of its decolonisation. British rule may have gone but its systems and institutions remain and Hong Kong is experiencing the stage of

---

[31] Chapter II Article 13 of the *Basic Law* states that "The Central People's Government shall be responsible for the foreign affairs relating to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China shall establish an office in Hong Kong to deal with foreign affairs. The Central People's Government authorizes the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to conduct relevant external affairs on its own in accordance with this Law." And in Article 14: "The Central People's Government shall be responsible for the defence of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall be responsible for the maintenance of public order in the Region. Military forces stationed by the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for defence shall not interfere in the local affairs of the Region. The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region may, when necessary, ask the Central People's Government for assistance from garrison in the maintenance of public order and in disaster relief."

Neocolonialism and exposed to the rule and judgment of "international sovereignty". What is more, it is colonised once again by Communist China under its 'Greater China' ambition.

## IV. Global and Local and the Dilemma in Hong Kong Identity

In the view of the ambivalent and peculiar political situation that Hong Kong has experienced, it is high time for the ex-colony to come to a real understanding of the definition of its identity in order to decide the delineation of its new post-colonial identity. As I suggested in the previous section, with limited political autonomy and self-determination, Hong Kon in its post-colonial period can be considered as standing at a new stage of "colonialism". Hence, I am highly skeptical of the postcoloniality of the post-colonial identity of Hong Kong. In this research, therefore, "postcolonial" and "post-colonial" will be used simultaneously, referring respectively to theories and mentalities and the period. So, what is Hong Kong identity, what does it consist of? As Hongkongers have experienced the problem of colonisation by Britain, political invasion by Japan in World War II, cultural invasions and dominations of Euro-American powers, the influence of globalisation, immigration from China and emigration to western democratic countries, their identity has never been a rigid, stable, inflexible and unproblematic one. Instead, similar to the hyphenated racial minority groups in modern multiracial states, Hong Kong identity is a juxtaposition of races, ethnicities, nationalities and cultural identities. However, will all these fragments of multicultural, transnational identities be made uniform by the newly imposed Chinese identity after 1997? Did the genuine postcoloniality of Hong Kong come before its post-colonial

period?

The study of political and economic changes is inadequate to illustrate the effect of colonialism and examine the postcoloniality of Hong Kong. As has been pointed out by Rey Chow in "Between Colonisers: Hong Kong's Postcolonial Self-Writing in the 1990s", Hong Kong is an anomaly of postcoloniality. [32]At the same time, Edward Said casts doubt on the simplistic way scholars like Chomsky have tried to define the notion as "principally economic",[33] and he suggests that imperialism is "a word and an idea today so controversial, so fraught with all sorts of questions, doubts, problemics, and ideological premises as nearly to resist use altogether."[34] In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said tries to bring our attention to the cultural aspect and effect of imperialism on the colonies. Imperialism as traditionally understood, that is, actual contests over a land and its people, definitely affects landscape and geography as a testament of historical experience. However, Said points out that there is a new form of imperialism, which exerts a similar cultural and economic influence, emerging in the twentieth century with the rise of the West after the two world wars even though World War Two seems to have dismantled "the age of empire" and put an end to the colonial structure and classical imperialism.[35] In other words, Western power extends its influence onto the world through economic and cultural means instead of a political one and "the world [has been] united into a single interacting whole as never

---

[32] Rey Chow, "Between Colonisers: Hong Kong's Postcolonial Self-Wriitng in the 1990s", p. 50 in *Ethics after Idealism : theory, culture, ethnicity, reading*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 149-167.
[33] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994), p.3.
[34] Loc. cit.
[35] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 6.

before."[36]

In fact, with the help of science and technology, mass media communication and global capitalism, Western power, including American and European countries, tends to exercise its influences and "colonise" the Asian Pacific, where there are many less developed and developing countries. This new form of "imperialism" colonises through the interplay between the invading global culture and the invaded local culture. Globalisation unites the whole world into one place by redefining a new concept of cultural space and reshaping the notion of traditional boundary. Instead of restructuring the world territorially as imperialism intends to do, globalisation makes the world shrink by cultural means. Hence, the search the answer to the postcoloniality of Hong Kong is not merely the solving of the problem of historical conjuncture or geographical space caused by British colonisation; it is also the generation of a new mechanism of identity construction.

Judging from the old paradigm of thinking about identity, there would be a simple resolution to the identity crisis of post-colonial Hong Kong: the decolonised Chinese city should define itself nationally, racially and ethnically. It seems to be an inapplicable solution as, regardless of the fact that Hong Kong is a multicultural and multiracial society, the majority of the populace of Hong Kong has immigrated, or descended from immigrants from China. They are racially Chinese and most of them are still strongly bound by Chinese values and living by Chinese customs and traditions. Ethnicity is one of the defining factors of Hong Kong identity.

[36] William H. McNeil, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed forces and Society Since 1000 AD*, pp260-1.

The concepts of "race", "culture" and "ethnicity" are closely related. Various ethnic groups are sometimes differentiated by their racial differences. While "race" focuses on the physical, external and biological differences between humans of different descendent lineages, a kind of prejudgment about individuals based upon outward differences of skin colour and even costume that is inflexible, it undermines the importance of cultural characteristics in constructing one's identity. "Ethnicity" tries to offer an additional meaning to the racial group in regards to its cultural and psychological differences.[37] It was first fully conceptualized in the time of the rise of nation-states in Europe in the eighteenth century, and was designed to arouse nationalist feelings, defining nationality, promoting national unity and, in the end, serving the purpose of consolidating the nation. But the term has been lately adopted to give a secondary definition to the identity of the racial minority groups in multiracial states like the United States, where "ethnic alignment [does not] coincide with national alignment."[38].

It is undeniable that ethnic ties offer the primary identity to Hong Kong in its dismayed condition of rootlessness, deracination and alienation; however, ethnicity does not succeed in fulfilling its function as an indicator of nationality. The absurd, paradoxical situation of Hong Kong being the independent dependency of the sovereign nations, Britain and the

---

[37] Refer to Manning Nash's *The Caldron of Ethnicity in the Modern World*, p 4: 'Ethnic ties have been bundled together with other kinds of deep, core, and primary bonds suffused with affect into a category of "primordial" ties. Primordial ties lie at the core of the person. They form the basic identity, and they are the markers of humanity that come to the person at the earliest periods of socialization, before there is a filter of rejection and acceptance. Primordial ties are thus the social expression the psychological basis of identity, selfhood, and of others who are like the self, and yet others who are different from self.'

[38] Banton, Michael. *Ethnic and Racial Consciousness*. (London: Longman, 1997), p. 3.

PRC, both before and after its decolonisation, prevents the territory from obtaining a substantial national identity. Hongkongers are excluded from being part of the nationals of Britain and of the PRC.[39] Hong Kong is under their sovereignty but is never a part of the nation. It remains at the periphery. Hong Kong seems to exemplify the most peculiar existence of being an autonomous entity, while having neither unique national, political nor even cultural attributes of its own. The sheer ethnic tie to Chinese ethnicity was unable to provide a secondary, supplementary identity to colonised Hong Kong in the first place, and Britain has never granted a primary legitimate and unambiguous nationality to its colony. Neither can it provide a distinguishable identity to Hong Kong after 1997. Since it has a dominating Chinese community within its multicultural social context, the Chinese ethnicity which Hong Kong shares with its sovereign power China does not seem to be able to give the Special Administrative Region a characterizing quality to distinguish itself from the sovereign state which fails to include it as part of the nation.

As a matter of fact, not only does the Chinese ethnicity of Hong Kong fail to offer its people a stable and psychologically reassuring identity, but it is also an entrapment that problematizes its identity crisis further. With almost a hundred years of British colonial institutional establishment and other western cultural and ideological influences, the Chinese community in Hong Kong has been largely assimilated. The influences of Chinese traditions, customs and cultures amongst the younger

---

[39] Hong Kong people did not share the same nationality as British, they held the British passport but they were given the nationality as "British nationality overseas". Same case applies to their nationality after 1997, instead of sharing the same nationality as the rest of the citizens of China, Hong Kong residents are issued their own HKSAR (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region) passport.

generation of Hong Kong's populace are weakened as compared with that amongst the older generation: from food and cuisine, which Hong Kong people consume as a fusion of Chinese, Japanese, Southeast Asian to Euro-American cuisines, to religions and festive practices, where they celebrate both western Christian festivals like Christmas and Easter as well as Chinese traditional festivals like Lunar New Year and Buddhist Festival. Hong Kong culture is a cauldron of a vivid variety of multi-cultures in which Chinese culture is merely one of many. Ethnicity is no longer synonymous with cultural identity in the case of Hong Kong. Chinese ethnicity, therefore, is reduced to little more than a physical, biological marker of race and the origin of its people, rather than a psychological linkage and bond to the motherland. As mentioned in the early part of this chapter, nationalist sentiments barely exist in Chinese culture; psychological bonding through Chinese ethnicity, weak or lacking in the case of Hong Kong, fails to generate a sense of belonging, not to say a sense of unity or patriotism in Hongkongers towards China. However, this Chinese ethnicity Hong Kong share with the PRC has become a psychological entrapment and a moral burden that hinders Hong Kong to have a complete detachment from their Chinese blood lineage with its sovereignty China. The very fact of being racially Chinese pulls Hongkongers back from choosing and creating a new unique cultural identity of their own. It continues the problem of marginality in Hong Kong identity.

While Hong Kong people are not satisfied with their racial and national identity, their cultural identity is even more complex due to globalisation. Hong Kong is facing the phenomenon of the globalisation

process caused by Westernisation, transnationalism and colonisation which further complicates the identity crisis of Hong Kong. The dilemma in identity of Hong Kong is caused more by a practical cultural-economical reason than a psychological ethnic-racial reason. Due to the fear of Communist China, a lot of Hong Kong people have chosen to emigrate to Western countries and to obtain a foreign passport and nationality in order to safeguard the continuity of their freedom after 1997. This trend of migration from Hong Kong from the 1970s onwards has given rise to a new form of identity unique to Hong Kong people. Nationality is no longer given like race and ethnicity; rather, it is voluntarily chosen and fluid. This transnational identity becomes part of the attributes of Hong Kong which further complicates the perplexity of Hong Kong identity. In fact, this transnational flow of people is one of the key factors that intensify globalisation and its effect on Hong Kong. It upsets old conceptions of national and cultural identity and challenges the old paradigm of thinking about race, culture and identity.[40] "While traditional indigenous culture can be understood as a continuous historical process, contemporary culture is conceived as a phenomenon of transnational formation resulting from the forces of global stratification."[41] Hence, the dilemma in the postcolonial identity of Hong Kong is not simply about ethnicity and race. It emerges from the struggle between the old and the new, the tension between localism and globalism, the preservation of the traditional values and cultural roots and the desire for modernization. The colonial experience,

---

[40] David Y.H. Wu, "Facing the Challenge of Multiple Cultural Identities", p. 142 in Emerging Pluralism in Asia and the Pacific, pp 141-147.

[41] Kwok-kan Tam, Terry Siu-han Yip, Wimal Dissanayake, "Introduction: Localism, Globalism and Cultural Production" in *Sights of Contestation: localism, globalism and cultural production in Asia and the Pacific* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2002), xiii. .

together with the interplay between the local and the global has not only brought cultural reshaping to Hong Kong; it has also brought a cultural disorientation to the newly decolonised city.

## V. Postcolonial Identity: Marginality and Hybridity

Postcolonial theorists have been trying to deconstruct and redefine modern identity. As this research focuses only on the concept of identity of decolonised Hong Kong, therefore, the main focus will be on the exploration of a postcolonial view of the relationship between the coloniser and colonised identity and the reconstruction of the post-colonial and anti-colonial identity of the ex-colonised subjects. Gender identity and sexuality and other forms of marginalities will be dealt with as secondary and symbolic representations of political and cultural postcoloniality. Even though the changes in gender role play an important part in the evolution of modern identity, and the Chinese patriarchal social structure of Hong Kong has undergone a significant change due to postcoloniality and globalization, this research will analyze such gender identity as a symbolic part of Hong Kong cultural and linguistic identity as a whole. Due to the complications of colonial history and political changes, as well as the cultural displacement brought by the colonial institutional settlement in the colonised or formerly colonised states, postcolonial identity raises some of the most perplexing issues. And in the case of Hong Kong, the complexity of such postcoloniality is further complicated by the trend of globalisation. While Hong Kong is internally facing the conflict between the colonised and colonial cultures, it is externally torn by the tension between localism and globalism. Rather than focusing on how to reshape identity for

postcolonial Hong Kong, it is important to understand the process behind such identity disorientation. Therefore, in the study of the formation of postcolonial identity, one should be aware of the several stages involved in its development.

Regardless of the disagreement in their views of what postcolonial identity is and how it should be constructed, there are few postcolonial theorists who do not share the fundamental goal of undoing and deconstructing the identity that is imposed on colonised subjects by the colonial power. One way of doing this is to renounce all colonial representations. Colonialism might be seen as a Eurocentric notion which places the colonial powers in the centre and constructs a system and order of exploitation based on a Western pattern. Amongst the theorists, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha are the three pillars of a discipline which successfully brings "radical" Western theory of postmodernism and poststructuralism to bear on analysis of the colonial and postcolonial issue. Said, as the pioneer of this school of thought, boldly adopts Lacan's theory in redefining the power relationship between the coloniser and the colonised in *Orientalism*. He makes the analogy of Europe the Occident as the *self* and the *subject*. In this way, the non-European, the Orient is marginalized to the periphery as the *other*, the outsider which is *subjected* to the invasion, exploitation and domination of the centre. By doing so, Said has laid down a solid foundation for the future study of the colonial and post-colonial issue. He characteristically implies and vividly builds up the idea that the coloniser, as the dominant power, successfully "maximized" itself at the expensive of its subjects who were rendered almost entirely passive and were silenced by conquest. His

anti-colonial way of polarizing the discourse and agency of the coloniser and the passivity of the colonised has contributed to a major breakthrough in literary criticism. Many of postcolonial literary critiques have been preoccupied with the discovery and renouncement of such colonial representations in literary works.

Nevertheless, to uncover the hints of colonial implantation such as the imposing of otherness and objectivity in the colony, it is not enough to renounce the colonial regime. Said's account of colonialism is valid and powerful; yet, it falls inevitably into the trap of being over-simplistic, unitary and even potentially Eurocentric. Indeed, in order to relinquish and condemn the inequality and imbalance of power in the colonial system, Edward Said puts his emphasis on exposing the discourse and agency of the coloniser. Rather than resolving the tension between the coloniser and its subjects, *Orientalism* indirectly reinforces the dominant order imposed by the coloniser on the colonised, and Homi Bhabha recognizes that Said "hints continually at a polarity or division at the very centre of Orientalism."[42] At the same time, theorists like Ania Loomba rather think that acknowledging such an imbalanced power relationship may be a way to approve and even consolidate the power of the coloniser. Loomba points out that

> [...] many critics are beginning to ask whether, in the process of exposing the ideological and historical functioning of such binaries, we are in danger of reproducing cultural/racial difference and alterity, albeit from a different ideological standpoint than those of colonialist discourses?[43]

---

[42] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1991), p. 73.

[43] Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, p. 104.

Hence, a more complete way to relinquish an imposed colonised identity is to deconstruct the whole ideological system and framework of colonialism, which involves not only the rejection of colonised identity, but also includes a denial of the colonial identity. Such an approach can be exemplified by James Clifford in *The Predicament of Culture*, where he states his objective as "to displace any transcendent regime of authenticity [and] purity."[44] The basic aim of postcolonial theorists is to completely eliminate colonial representations and the identity which they impose on them. Their goal is to be achieved by the deconstruction of the existing colonial paradigm through dislocating the colonial regime from the centre.

Recently, the focus of postcolonial theorists has shifted to a more proactive area. Not only does postcolonial theory deconstruct the colonial paradigm, but it also subverts the traditional concept of identity. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, one of the most prominent postcolonial theorists after Edward Said, tries to supplement the inadequacy of *Orientalism* by devoting her effort to studying the "subaltern". Throughout her career, Spivak has attempted to pay attention to colonised people and their successors in the neo-colonial era, the subjected and underprivileged group which Said has overlooked in his work. She borrows the term "subaltern" from Gramsci, who was originally used it to describe subordinate and marginalized social groups in European society, in order to describe the colonised and the marginalized subjects in the postmodern world. Rather than simply reveal the tension between the coloniser and the colonised and restate the coloniser's domination, Spivak is keen to look out for a solution

[44] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature and art*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 23.

to this imbalanced power relationship. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?", the writer shows her concern about the degree to which the (post)colonial subaltern enjoys agency. She attempts to explore the possibility of the subaltern speaking for themselves rather than being condemned to be known, represented and spoken for only in a distorted fashion, especially by those who have exploited them, and also others such as the "concerned" outsiders like aidworkers and "disinterested" scholars like anthropologists whose concern and examination of them are merely a future disempowerment.

As a female scholar, Spivak possesses a different level of understanding of postcoloniality from that of Said. Indeed, Spivak's perception of the marginality suffered by the colonised in the postmodern social order is not unitary. It is a complex marginalization torn between the forces of two poles of (neo)colonialism and indigenous patriarchy. Spivak makes the observation that "the figure of the [third world] women [forever] disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization."[45] Even though Spivak proactively tries to find a voice for the subaltern, her conclusion is unequivocally negative. She conceives, through the mechanics of the "itinerary of silencing", like Said in *Orientalism*, of the subordinate as the "silent interlocutor" of the dominant order. There is no space for the subaltern to speak in the terms of colonial discourse and of the dominant culture, and the voice of the subaltern is only produced as victimized and traumatized.

It is obvious that Said's and Spivak's theories have a strong political

---

[45] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the subaltern Speak?", p. 102.

orientation. At the same time, it seems that they inevitably fall back into the trap of polarizing the coloniser and the colonized: they are admitting their peripheral and eccentric position while they are confronting the dominant order. By the same token, the classification and the naming of such *postcolonial literature*, or literature written by non-English nationals, also reveals this problematic marginalizing nature. There is perplexity in the various names given to this type of literature. Names such as Commonwealth Literature, Post-colonial Literature, World Literature in English and the New Literatures in English are given to literary works written by English-language writers outside the mainstream British and American traditions. Patrick Colm Hogan, in *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, defines *postcolonial literature* as

> literature emerging from the historical encounter between culturally distinct and geographically separated societies, where for some extended period one society controls the other politically and economically; moreover, during this period, the dominated society remains numerically and culturally prevalent in its own geographical location, and the dominated society justifies its control through denigration of the dominated culture and through the ideological insistence that the dominated people are an inferior race. In other words, the body of literature I should like to isolate has the following characteristics: it is the historical result of direct political and economic domination. This direct domination need not be in place currently (i.e., the colony may have achieved independence). However, direct domination must have continued for a long enough period to establish lasting political and economic structures, as well as ideological or cultural institutions (school, etc.) that continue to have

important effects....[46]

On the other hand, the traditionally favoured label of *Commonwealth Literature* exclusively includes only the literature from the fifty countries belonging to the political association. As a matter of fact, both labels have a reminder of British colonial history and they reveal a strong colonial undertone.

At the same time, since the term *postcolonial literature* tends to stress the "postcolonial" and historical dimension more than that of the English language, French and other European scholars favour the names of *New Literatures/World Literature in English* instead to refer to this literary category. However, these labels inevitably try to classify the literature politically on old and new, within and outside the English traditions as well as putting the English nationals as the centre and the world as the periphery. Regardless of the different levels of political correctness and neutrality adopted in depicting and classifying this literary category, the labels themselves have strong political implication and marginalize the works that fall into these categories from the mainstream. All these labels are inadequate and inappropriate in representing the literary category as they all involve implicit and explicit political and cultural exclusion from and comparison to the mainstream and Skinner comments that "th[is] constant implication that one literature is in subordinate or derivative relation to another is undesirable, and increasingly without objective basis."[47]

It seems that regardless of its rising importance in the literary sphere,

---

[46] Patrick Colm Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity: Crises of Tradition in the Anglophone Literatures of India, Africa and the Caribbean*, (New York : State University of New York Press 2000), p. 3

[47] John Skinner, *The Stepmother Tongue*, (New Yor: St Martin's Press, 1998), p. 6.

with the dominance of the West, the coloniser which even postcolonial theorists like Said and Spivak acknowledge, the English writings written by non-English nationals are inevitably marginalized and pushed to the periphery. John Skinner tries to suggest the use of *Anglophone Literature* to represent the category as the word *Anglophone* is a relatively politically neutral term which emphasizes only the linguistic aspect of the literary category rather than linking it to British colonial history. However, the term *Anglophone* still has its disadvantage: it differentiates English (native English) from englishes. Anglophone Literature includes the literature written in many varieties of English in the world except that of the "native English" writers (from Britain) and American writers (but not racial minority American writers). In other words, by using this label, a boundary is set culturally to segregate this non-native literary category from the mainstream native English literature, or put in Skinner's terms, marginalize the adopted tongue from the mother tongue English literature. Anglophone literature, in this way, will be discredited as a stepmother-tongue literature and always as the second best and subordinated.

So the core of the question becomes: is there a way to eliminate the boundary which marginalizes and emphasizes the adopted, inferior quality of Anglophone Literature as well as the domination imposed on the colonised by the coloniser? And is there such a need to eliminate this boundary in the first place? While Said's works confirm the coloniser's agency, and Spivak's rebels against colonial domination, Homi Bhabha shows his disapproval of the colonial social order by attempting to deconstruct the deeply rooted, established system and the conception of colonial epistemology. The postcolonial theorist is not satisfied with a

traditional concept of identity which stresses the stability and dominance of one single, specific, central culture. Bhabha develops his theory from Said but he reappraises Said's account of the coloniser's agency and identity which he perceieves as too monolithically powerful and unitary. He finds Said's and Said's predecessor Fanon's account of the colonised problematic in the sense that the conceptualization of the agency of the colonised is too much in conformity with the model of the heroic sovereign humanist subject. As Bhabha is greatly influenced by Freud and Lacan, he applies a psychoanalytical approach to examine the colonised and coloniser identity. For Bhabha, instead of a mere polarity, the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised is far more complex, nuanced, perplexed and politically ambivalent than either *Orientalism* or *The Wretched of the Earth* recognize. He believes that identity and agency in the colonial context are deeply inflected by the operation of the "unconscious" and therefore Bhabha's coloniser is less secure, both physically and politically, than is implied in *Orientalism*.

At the same time, Homi Bhabha has produced one of his most unrelenting and insightful questions in his work *The Location of Culture*:

> how does the deconstruction of the 'sign', the emphasis on indeterminacy in cultural and political judgement transform our sense of the 'subject' of culture and the agent of historical change?[48]

This has become one of main focuses and controversies of examination for his contemporaries and successors. Bhabha has turned the conventional perception of culture and identity upside-down and he criticizes traditional cultural specification as the "cultural continuism" which has it that "culture

[48] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 174.

[is a] populist nostalgia", whereas he introduces "incommensurability" or "untranslatability" as an alternative to it. In other words, resistance to colonialism can be shown through vicissitudes to which all language, according to Derrida's *Writing and Difference*, is intrinsically liable, especially through the play of "repetition" and difference. English culture and Englishness, in the case of Hong Kong, was brought from its cultural origin to the colony through colonisation, however, this culture, as Bhabha suggests, once translated[49] into the alien context of the Hong Kong arena, "is no longer a representation of an essence; it is now [merely] a partial presence, a [strategic] device in a specific colonial engagement."[50] In this way, Bhabha's innovative view of resistance to colonial agency complements the models of subaltern agency but at the same time, provide a novel view and constructive possible solution for the redefinition of postcoloniality.

Indeed, many arguments and discussions are raised by this theory. Nevertheless, it is one of the rationales of postcolonial theorists to be discontented with and deconstruct confinement within a fixity of a single culture. What is implied in Bhabha's incommensurability is, "the momentous, if momentary extinction of the recognizable objection of culture in the disturbed artifice of its signification at the edge of experience."[51] By deconstructing Eurocentric domination and its cultural specification, postcolonial theorists are liberating themselves from centre-periphery ideology and hence, are reluctant to conform to any specific

[49] Please note the word "translate" derives from the Latin "transfer" meaning "carry across".
[50] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp. 114-5.
[51] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 126.

cultures. Indeed, Peter Hallward has made the following observation of postcolonialist theory:

> Plural and heterogenous struggles against homogeneity, 'the category of postcolonialism must be read as a free-floating metaphor for cultural embattlement', a clarion call in favor of truly substantial differences. Nothing is more orthodox in the postcolonial domain than an insistence on the multiple, particular, heterogeneous nature of contexts and subject-positions.[52]

Postcolonial identity stresses diversity and pluralism. Difference and marginality, which were formerly a source of devaluation in the Eurocentric colonial paradigm, are now highly valued by the postcolonialist theorists. Indeed, unlike traditional concepts of identity, postcolonial identity is not about "being", on the contrary, it is about "becoming". Postcolonial theorists take the fragmented, complex multiplicity of their identity as an advantage. The rootlessness and placelessness of postcolonial identity gives itself the freedom to transcend the differences and marginality of various cultures. At the same time, it is through hybridizing across cultural borders that a postcolonial identity is formed. Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity does not stop at the stage of marginality; the theorist aims, by transcending the differences of multiplicity and cultural borders, to find beyond these differences a unique and genuine postcolonial identity.

Indeed, Bhabha's concept of "beyond" is not a new horizon but it gives a new perspective of postmodern time and space to the existing paradigm of thoughts:

---

[52] Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: writing between the singular and the specific*. (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 2001)., p. 21.

> "Beyond" signifies spatial distance, marks progress, premises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary by the very act of going beyond—are unknowable and unrepresentable, without a return to the 'present' which in process of being disjunct and displaced.[53]

Instead of trying to change, reshape and remove the existing boundary and border of rigid space and time which give difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, Bhabha's concept provides a new way to see the flexibility in the present inflexible singularies of the present. With this innovative perspective in looking beyond the rigid physical border, the traditional concept of space being physical is redefined. Bhabha's theory facilitates the act of transcending and thinking beyond the originary and initial subjectivity. In this way, a new, invisible imaginary space is created in between the transcended physical border of culture, language and identity. This fluid imaginary space, the so-called "in-between" space, provides the "terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood-singular and communal"[54] and allows a new way of negotiating one's identity in various marginalities. John McLeod seeks to encapsulate Homi Bhabha's theory in three main points. Firstly, Bhabha opposes "the idea of a 'sovereign' or essentialised subject."[55] Bhabha perceives hybrid identities as those who live 'border lives' due to migration, diaspora, self-imposed exile and colonisation and decolonisation. He emphasizes the stages of such 'border lives' on the margins of different nations, in between contrary homelands. He views hybridity as a going beyond in-betweenness and transition, a dynamic

---

[53] Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, p. 4
[54] Ibid. p.2
[55] John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 218.

search for identity and the crossing of threshold instead of a static formation of a new identity. What Hong Kong people are facing are the multiple marginalities brought about by the decolonisation and "re-colonisation" by China, the economic imperialism of the Western powers and the cultural neocolonialism of Japanese and American popular culture, as further intensified by the Hong Kong people's self-imposed exile and migration to the United States, Canada, Australia and Britain, and the immigration of Mainland Chinese into the city. These various sovereign and existential identities imposed on Hongkongers endanger the wholeness of the subjectivity of the people and, in fact, tear it to pieces. And hence, Hong Kong writers are trying to negotiate between all these contraries and to go beyond such imposed, conflicting and marginalizing existential identities.

Secondly, McLeod makes the observation that Bhabha focuses on 'articulation' and 'elaboration' and how "the border is a place of possibility and agency for new ideas",[56] and thirdly, he explains that "the new 'signs' of identity which are possible impact upon both individuals and groups", and crossing and going "beyond", offer ways for a communal identity to rethink old ideas of binary logic.[57] Indeed, creating a totally new identity for Hong Kong is never the purpose of postcolonial Hong Kong writers. They explore the borders, the margins and in-betweenness that Hong Kong is living and residing in. By writing out of such marginality, they want to empower themselves and exercise their subjectivity in crossing the threshold, transcending physical boundaries, subliming cultural and

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

invisible psychological borders and eventually deconstructing the imposed old values of marginality, by manipulating and asserting their hybrid identity.

# CHAPTER TWO

## *Representing Hong Kong – Literature of Hong Kong*

### I. What is Hong Kong Literature?

Hong Kong has been called a "cultural desert".[58] Regardless of its advancement in technology, well-developed economic and financial systems and the high standard of living of its populace, the development in the area of arts and humanities of the city is still at an immature stage. This phenomenon is caused by weak support from the central authority, the weak rapport with the general public, and the lack of a substantial audience. Mainstream Hong Kong culture can be said to be an imported culture.[59] In consists primarily of Chinese culture, but has been affected by British colonization. In recent decades, trends influenced by Japanese and American popular cultures have contributed to the basic framework of Hong Kong popular culture. Cultural taste and development in this rapidly growing city are largely shaped by consumer demand. It is an "instant culture" that is determined by the market; cultural activities have catered for majority tastes. So, though the movie industry of Hong Kong prospers, it remains a massive producer of popular, low quality, low-brow works. High-brow cultural activities, such as literature, classical music and the visual arts, are viewed as a luxurious taste restricted to the minority of

[58] Yu Qiuyu (余秋雨), a popular writer in mainland, once said publicly that "with the presence of Rao Zongyi, Hong Kong would not be a cultural desert", reacting to the common opinion that the region is a utilitarian "cultural desert" (文化沙漠). His remark has become a catchphrase in the Chinese intellectual circles (Refer to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jao_Tsung-I)

[59] As mentioned in Chapter One, the majority of the populace of Hong Kong are Chinese migrants from Mainland China and Southeast Asia during World War Two, the Chinese Civil War and the Cultural Revolution. They brought with them not only manpower, but also capital and intellects which helped the rapid cultural, industrial and commercial development of Hong Kong in the second half of the twentieth century.

intellectuals and the upper class, and have to remain a Western import instead of a local production in order to preserve their status. Hence, there had been neither the demand for nor any intention of developing a genre of literature that uniquely represents Hong Kong, and is made by Hongkongers. It was not until the signing of Sino-British Joint Declaration and the approaching of 1997, the handover, that the people of Hong Kong started to look with growing urgency for their identity and a unique culture of their own. It is largely due to this crisis of identity that the genre of Hong Kong Literature has come into being.

**The Developing of Local Literature in Hong Kong**

One may argue that there has always been literature of Hong Kong. It is undeniable that there are thousands of books by Hong Kong writers published in the city every year, and they are easily accessible in all local bookstores. However, are these Hong Kong writers' works Hong Kong Literature? In order to answer the question, it is necessary to have a clear definition of what Hong Kong Literature is. The literary development and style of local literature has been greatly influenced by the social and political development of the colony. As a matter of fact, the ambivalence of definition of Hong Kong literature is symmetrical to the problematic colonial identity of Hong Kong: the series of political instabilities within the city and in Mainland China, Taiwan and countries surrounding the city, as well as the colonial experience, have threatened the identity of the people, and at the same time impeded the growth of its literature. Even though local writing has been part of popular cultural activity since around the 1960s, the lack of variety of its form and style and the shallowness of

its subject matters reveals the exploitation and repression which colonization has brought to the people of Hong Kong. As a result, there are few literary works in Hong Kong which have a political vision and the ambition to examine social reality. Towards the end of the twentieth century, as the self-awareness of the colony became more perplexed, local writers lost any remaining will to take on major themes, and the local literature of Hong Kong tended to become still more commercialized and monotonous.

To solve this problem, it is important for us to look for literary works that represent Hong Kong instead of merely being written in Hong Kong. So, we have to ask ourselves, when did the city start to develop its individual identity? And when did the literary works of Hong Kong start to represent the city? Although there has been a consistent production of literature in Hong Kong throughout the twentieth century, the works written before 1950s lack uniqueness and fail to represent the cultural characteristics of the city. Literary works of Hong Kong in the 1930s and 40s are greatly influenced by communist thinking in China, and are merely propaganda tools used by the Communist Party in offsetting the political influence of the Nationalist Party during the Civil War. So, scholars usually consider 1945-9, the period when both World War II and Civil War in China ended and when the refugees from China settled down and the population of Hong Kong was stabilized, as the inaugural period of Hong Kong literature.[60] Recently, political instabilities and social changes in

---

[60]Scholars like Chan Ching Fong (陳正芳) and Mike Ingham tend to consider the period of the two wars as the initiation of Hong Kong Literature and as a matter of fact, *City Voice: Hong Kong Writings in English 1945 to the Present*, a book which Imgham co-edited with Xu Xi, openly sets a boundary to the period when Hong Kong Literature emerged.

Hong Kong and other nearby countries such as the Chinese Civil War, the Cultural Revolution and the armament race between Taiwan and Mainland China brought Hong Kong a huge population of intellectuals. The brain drain from the neighbouring Chinese community has provided both a demand for literature and a supply of writers. At the same time, the steady economic growth and prosperity since then has produced a more favorable environment for literary development, with both abundant investment for publications and broadened readership due to an increasing educational level. Chan Ching Fong suggests categorizing the literary history of Hong Kong in three major stages[61]. The population boom in the late 1940s brought a group of Chinese intellectuals to Hong Kong, and they became the most significant figures in the literary field of the city throughout the 1950s and 60s. At the same time, this colonial environment of Hong Kong provided them with a chance to be exposed to Western culture and the Modernist style of writing. Renowned writers like Hsu Yu (徐訏) continued their literary creativity after their relocation to Hong Kong after a long period of political instability. But the 1950s was also a period when young intellects, both locally born and immigrated, showed their ambition in experimenting with their own literary writings. It was when Jin Yong (金庸), the penname of Louis Cha, Liu Yichang (劉以鬯) and Kwun Nan (崑南), members of the first generation of Hong Kong writers, started off their writing careers. So, the 1950s are considered to be the foundational period of Hong Kong literary development. Most of the writers at that time started their writing career as columnists in newspapers. Jin Yong founded

[61]陳正芳, 香港文學/香港女性文學/香港女作家黃碧雲 (Chan Ching Fong, "Hong Kong Literature/Hong Kong Woman Literature/Hong Kong Female Writer Wong Bik Wan")

the Hong Kong Daily *Ming Pao* in 1959 and published his wuxia (Martial Art and Chivalry) novels in *Ming Pao* and other Chinese newspapers at that time. The literature produced at that time was not very well developed in its form, and the publishing business did not begin to flourish until the mid 60s to 70s. But the new environment provided freedom and flexibility for these writers to develop their style. Even though not many works were produced in this period, many of them were presented in the form of urban myths, where a mood of struggling prevails. It reveals the urgency of these writers to get a new form of literature to define themselves, their works and their city.

In the 60s, the publishing industry in Hong Kong became better developed. In this second stage, popular literature became the mainstream of literature in Hong Kong. The pioneers Jin Yong, Liu Yichang, Kwun Nan, joined by Xi Xi and others, continued to publish in Hong Kong. Through the influence of Western culture, many Hong Kong writers adopted Western skepticism and the values of social reality in their works. The 1960s represents a prime time of Hong Kong literary development. A huge volume of high quality literary works such as Liu's *Drunkard*《酒徒》(1963) and the whole series of Jin Yong's wuxia novels (14 sets) were produced during this decade. With the newly arrived Western perspective and values, many local writers were adventurous in exploring possibilities of creativity, and the works in the 60s are highly experimental. These ambitious writers did not limit themselves to writing for the people of a small region, they spread their influence to the Chinese-speaking communities in the regional areas such as Singapore and Malaysia. They actively promoted Chinese creative writing and cultural

activities in the Southeast and East Asian regions: Jin Yong founded a newspaper in Singapore and Liu became the chief editor of a newspaper in Malaysia. They remained the dominating literary figures in the 1970s and 80s, and their works are still influential in the cultural development of Hong Kong and Asia.[62]

The 1970s mark the beginning of the third stage of Hong Kong literature. With the rapid development of the economy, society was to experience a drastic change. Also, the period saw the emergence of the first generation of locally born Hong Kong writers. It is a period of the meeting of old and new. Lacking the cultural connection and burden of the older generations, the Hong Kong-born writers always express a sense of loss and identity crisis in their works. At the same time, with the improvement of the standard of living and the education level, there is a growing awareness of the status of women in society. As a result, a group of well-educated, enlightened new female writers emerges. Writers like Siu Sze and Wong Bik Wan are the representatives of this new generation of writers who are sensitive to their own role as women in this patriarchal society as well as to the political and cultural changes taking place in their society. Since then, reflectiveness and searching for individual identity have become the dominant themes in Hong Kong literature. This sense of anxiety and questing remains after the 1997 handover and has become characteristic of local literature.

Amongst local popular literary works, there are two main genres that are most well-developed and representative: wuxia fictions and romances.

---

[62] Wong Kar Wai's movies *In the Mood of Love* and *2046* are claimed to be inspired by and alluding to Liu's *Drunkard* and other works; while Jin Yong's wuxia novels have been adapted into movies, drama serials and animation broadcast in the whole Asian area.

Even though the reputation of Hong Kong's wuxia fictions has surpassed that of similar productions in China, Taiwan and other Chinese-speaking regions,[63] it is also true that this genre originated from China. As a matter of fact, most of the renowned kung-fu fiction writers had gained their fame before they migrated to Hong Kong[64]. Moreover, the content of these novels are all set in ancient China, and none of the characters and events are associated with Hong Kong. So, although there can be no doubt that this locally-produced kung-fu fiction genre has gained recognition and stood out from its kind, the genre does not exclusively belong to Hong Kong and uniquely represent the city.

The genre of romance arose later, around the 70s and 80s, and most of the romance writers have been native in Hong Kong. Even though these works are written by local writers for the local readership, there is no novelty in their form or plot; these works do not have their own special characteristics but are a repetition of clichés. Just like wuxia fictions, romances of Hong Kong, lacking evocative and distinctive qualities, are merely one of the many literatures found in Hong Kong and not Hong Kong Literature. Hence, a work being produced in Hong Kong, by a Hong Kong writer or written for Hong Kong audience does not define it as Hong

---

[63] Jin Yong's fiction has a widespread following in Chinese-speaking areas, including Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia. His fifteen novels and short fiction – composed between 1955 and 1972 – earned him a reputation as one of the finest wuxia ("martial arts and chivalry") writers ever. He is the best-selling Chinese author alive; over 30 million copies of his works have been sold worldwide (over 100 million if one includes bootleg copies)·
Jin Yong's works have been translated into Korean, English, Japanese, French, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Burmese and Thai and he has many fans abroad as well, thanks to the numerous adaptations of his works made into films, television series, and video games.

[64] Both Jin Yong and Liang Yusheng (梁羽生), another prominent wuxia novelist and the founder of modern wuxia novels, were born and educated in China. Even though their works are published in Hong Kong, their language, style and even the content of the novels lack the characteristics of Hong Kong as they are strongly under the influence of traditional Chinese culture.

Kong Literature. So, once again, what is Hong Kong Literature?

First and foremost, the defining quality of Hong Kong Literature is that it should be unique and solely found in Hong Kong. As mentioned earlier, the first generation of Hong Kong-born local writers emerged in 1970s. But still the majority of them tended to explore their identity crisis subtly. Writers like Xi Xi and Siu Sze[65] approached questions of identity in a traditional way: they searched for their individual fulfillment through literary aesthetic means. However, they have done very little to construct a macroscopic sense of identity for their city and their people. It is only since the late 1980s that the new generation of local intellectuals has been getting more conscious of the changes in their society and the world around them, as well as of their own identity. Because of the 1997 issue they feel the threat, with the change of the status quo, to their existing identity, however ill-defined and marginalized it may be. They sense the urgency of redefining their identity. They have started to explore their identity, their city and their relationship with the world through their exploration of a new genre of literature. It is a literary genre defined by its locality rather than its form or its language. It is a genre that has originated in Hong Kong and remains bound to Hong Kong. Due to their various backgrounds, writers like Wong Bik Wan write in Chinese, while P.K.Leung chooses to be a bilingual writer and Louise Ho, Agnes Lam and Xu Xi write in English. They all assert themselves through literary creativity. And in writing various fictional and non-fictional forms of poetry, prose and drama, they

[65] Siu Sze is a retired Professor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and one of the most famous Hong Kong writers. She has devoted her academic career to researching Hong Kong Literature. She is the founder of the Hong Kong Literature Research Institute and the Hong Kong Literature Database.

have started to search for linguistic identity. Yet they all share common themes, examining Hong Kong society and reflecting on the identity of Hong Kong. So, second, Hong Kong Literature is a theme-oriented genre. The situation of Hong Kong and the identity of its people are always the central themes of this genre. Owing to the fact that the medium of writing is not restricted to Chinese alone, the genre broadens the readership of Hong Kong Literature and makes it international. Thus, third, Hong Kong Literature is written for Hongkongers but not solely for them. It is a local literature written for an international readership. Therefore, it is not enough for the genre to be about Hong Kong; at the same time, it has to represent the city distinctively to be written in such a way as to introduce and to epitomize the city to the world. In a nutshell, the most decisive defining qualities of Hong Kong Literature are its locality, its theme and its purpose; while the medium of writing, its form and its writer seem to be secondary. Xu Xi, Agnes Lam and Louise Ho, leading writers, share no common backgrounds apart from the fact that they are all natives of Hong Kong. Xu Xi is an Indonesian-Chinese who has established America as her career base. Agnes Lam is a Hong Kong-born but Singaporean and American-trained linguist who gains her recognition as a poet from Southeast Asia. Louise Ho is an authority on English literature in Hong Kong who spent most of her student life in Europe, and has lately adopted Australian citizenship, retiring to that country. All of them are positioning themselves as local writers of Hong Kong. This chapter aims to answer several questions: how do Xu Xi, Agnes Lam and Louise Ho present themselves, regardless of their different nationalities and cultural identities, as local writers writing for Hong Kong? How do they represent their city? Who is

their target audience? What are their purposes and success? How do they justify their own role, their strategies and even styles of writing?

**Xu Xi**

Xu Xi's multicultural background and experience are the best reflection and accurate miniature of the cosmopolitan quality of Hong Kong. The writer of *Chinese Walls* (1994), *Daughters of Hui* (1996), *Hong Kong Rose* (1996), *The Unwalled City* (2001), is in a very suitable position to write about the cross-cultural life of Hong Kong. Xu Xi is a native of Hong Kong from an Indonesian-Chinese (*wah kiu*) family. She spent her childhood and young adulthood in the city. Until 1997, when she finally decided to surrender her second career and devote her effort and energy solely to her writing career, Xu Xi had been working in the field of international marketing and management with multinationals and leading a peripatetic life around the world. She now inhabits the flight path connecting New York, Hong Kong and New Zealand and dedicates herself to Anglophone Asian literature in education and publication. Not only has she chosen a longer route to her writing career, but Xu Xi has also made her path as a Hong Kong writer more difficult by committing herself to writing in her first language, English. "In the 1970's and 1980's, when she was developing her fictional voice, Xu Xi felt alone in her homeland. Unlike most Asian writers here, she wrote in English. Twice, for long periods, her antidote for isolation was to live in the United States"[66] (Arts Abroad, *The New York Times*).

The biographical background of this American-Indonesian-Chinese-

[66] Cited from the bookcover of *Hong Kong Rose*.

Hong Kong writer is itself a wonderful source for composing a novel. The cross-cultural experience of the writer has become the framework of her works, and traces of resemblance of the writer herself are easily detected in her protagonists. With the increasing popularity of English medium Asian writings, Xu Xi has easily established her fame in the literary sphere. The highly sensitive decolonizing Hong Kong setting has attracted further attention to her works. Nevertheless, there has not been scholarly study of her writing, the recognition of Xu Xi is yet to be gained and the value of her works decided in this kind of examination. The political reference of the writing has at the same time exposed her to criticism. Opinions and responses to Xu Xi's works diverge. The diversities range from the classification of her works to her language to her style. Due to her frequent stays in the United States, her multiple Asian identities (as a Hong Kong native and an Indonesian-Chinese), and her sophisticated English voice (as a native English speaker, taught by British English speakers and teaching in American English) she claims that when she tries to assert the complex richness of her language

> It didn't work to write British sometimes and American at others. My fiction was jammed between two national Englishes....The day I read *The Woman Warrior* I head the first truly clear echoes of myself. Her novelistic consciousness was uttered in English, but informed by Cantonese....My English is enriched by Chinese....[67]

She is always marginally categorized between an Asian-American, international and local writer. Frequently and inevitably, her works are compared with the canonical *The Woman Warrior*, and are criticized for the

[67] Refer to "Writing the Literature of Non-Denial" in *World Englishes*, No.3, November 2000. Blackwell, Oxford, UK & Boston, USA (420-2)

plainness of language, shallowness of plot, and the over-optimism which leads to a failure to represent the social reality of the multicultural city at the eve of its decolonization, and to capture a clear distinction between East and West despite the ambition of the writer. But as Xu Xi exclaims through her Ai-Lin and Paul in *Chinese Walls*, "Peter Pan has no nationality. Just like your Supergirl....Nothing that matters does"[68]. The writer has no intention of stereotyping her work in a rigid category, nor does she endeavour to dramatize the polarization of the various cultures in her city. It is beyond a shadow of doubt that Xu Xi is one of the most prominent writers in Hong Kong. Her works may present an objective and impartial view of social actuality in Hong Kong; nevertheless, these works are highly revealing of the mentality and perspective of Hong Kong inhabitants regarding the city.

By eventually forgoing her Indonesian penname Sussy Komala for her Chinese name Xu Xi,[69] the writer was determined to position herself as an Anglophone Chinese writer instead of an Southeast-Asian one. This gave her an easier path to develop her career, as Southeast Asian English writing is a more developed genre and has a broader readership. Xu Xi's determination to establish herself as a local writer is shown through her treatment of Hong Kong, the periphery unfamiliar to the majority of the English speaking audience, as the central matter of her works. She is one of the pioneers of Hong Kong literature, and has taken an active interest in the development of the literature. In recent years, apart from refurbishing her

---

[68] Xu Xi, *Chinese Walls*, p.115

[69] Xu Xi used the moniker Sussy Chako when she published her first novel *Chinese Walls*. She later reverted to her Indonesian name Sussy Komala and finally decided to settle with her Chinese name Xu Xi.

own writing career, Xu Xi has been working with contemporaries such as Louise Ho, Agnes Lam, Andrew Parkin and the academics of Hong Kong in fostering this embryonic local literary trend. *The City Voice*, an anthology of Hong Kong Literature (2004), has become the pre-eminent authority in this area. The whole anthology includes not only the works of renowned writers, but also experimental writings from the generation of young writers. Nevertheless, the cross-cultural background of Xu Xi raises special questions concerning the role of the writer and the genre of her works. In what way do Xu Xi's works count as literature of Hong Kong, and how accurate is the image of Hong Kong depicted in these works? Is Xu Xi a Hong Kong writer or a writer from Hong Kong? What perspective has she adopted in writing novels, an insider's or an outsider's?

**Symbolic Relationships and its Cultural Connotations:**

The very pen-name of the writer is able to give readers a glimpse of the fusion of identity presented in her works. By changing her pen-name from the Indonesian name Sussy Komala to Xu Xi, its Chinese transliteration, the writer shows the cultural fusion in herself and her works. Likewise, the time when the novels were published suggests that *Chinese Walls*, *Daughters of Hui* and *Hong Kong Rose* should be studied as more than simply family stories. The diasporic experience and *wah kiu* dilemma are familiar topics in many works of this genre; the common experience as described by a Hong Kong writer is especially fascinating to the local readers, and at the same time, it appeals to the curiosity of foreign readers. Xu Xi's works are not obviously political, but what the writer is searching for surely goes beyond the exploration of dysfunctional families

and the emotional odysseys of her native Hong Kong female protagonists. Hidden under the cliché of Western audience-pleasing narrative of traditional Chinese familial relationship, the politically correct gender conflict and the dramatically absurd treatment of love and sexual relationship, are deep cultural connotations bearing the hybridity of linguistic and cultural multiplicity of the city.

The novel *Chinese Walls* was first published in 1994 and was republished together with *Daughters of Hui*, a collection of a novella and the three short stories "Danny's Snake", "Loving Graham", "The Stone Window" and "Valediction" (1996) in its second edition in 2002. *Chinese Walls* is the second novel of Xu Xi. As in most of her works, Xu Xi has imposed her own *wah kiu* (overseas Chinese) experience on her protagonist Ai-Lin. Like herself, Ai-Lin is an Indonesian Chinese *wah kiu* who speaks English instead of Cantonese even though she is ethnically Chinese. Ai-Lin's cross-cultural and social experience as a cultural '*jaahp jung*' (mixed breed) in the Chinese community, an exile and 'Chinese doll' in American society and a writer, if not her love and sexual adventures, carry some autobiographical parallel with the author herself.

The novel is about the sensual odyssey of Ai-Lin told in the form of memory flashback, a search for the meaning of love, life, happiness and her identity. It is structured in seven chapters of fragmented, confused memories of the English-speaking Hong Kong born female protagonist Ai-Lin. Each chapter, except for the first Chapter 'Chung King Mansion', contains individual sections of her memories of the men in her life: her father, her elder brother Philip, Vince her ex-husband, Paul her eldest brother, Derek and her ex-brother-in-law Don to whom she is getting more

and more attached towards the end of the novel. Even though the memories of Ai-Lin are juxtaposed to build up the schema of the chaos of family life, lustful, loveless and love-fear relationship with Philip, Derek, Vince and Don, and a mental life which is at the edge of insanity, each chapter of the novel is in fact episodic and can be viewed as an individual short story about different aspect of Ai-Lin's experience.

Analyzing the novel from another angle, the mental breakdown of Ai-Lin can actually represent the result of the imbalance and tension of Ai-Lin, between her cultural, sexual and emotional lives, that she is struggling to negotiate. She is a female member of a Chinese family, in which, "in old China, daughters were discarded, considered useless. If a girl couldn't marry well, or be the first wife of a rich man, her best hope was to be a concubine"(88). She is being slighted, marginalized and even persecuted by her own mother. This familial disharmony represents the typical gender conflict in traditional Chinese society. Yet, the problem is intensified as the gender issue is interlocked with Chinese traditions. The Chinese values she inherits threaten her role as a daughter in the family. What is worse, it devalues her and endangers her individuality. As a westernized, English speaking *wah kiu* overseas Chinese, her Chineseness is being discredited and her pureness is being questioned as *jaahp jung* by her fellow ethnic Chinese members in school in the majority Cantonese-speaking Chinese community in Hong Kong. Yet, as a Chinese in American society where she thinks she belongs due to her comfortable feeling towards speaking English and adopting western culture, she is stereotyped as a Chinese doll by Americans like Derek, and she is too "Chinese" when compared with the "banana" yellow skinned but white hearted American born Chinese like

Dr Cheung. All these marginalize her as she has too much to insist upon, too much to bear, too much to hide and refuses to let go. The mental illness of Ai-Lin is symbolically the cultural illness that a marginalized ethnic Chinese Hong Kong female is facing.

The whole novel is presented as Ai-Lin's revelation of her past and reliving of it in her memory. As part of the novel is actually the revelation of Ai-Lin's secret to Dr. Felicia Cheung, a second generation American-born Chinese Freudian psychiatrist from whom Ai-Lin receives her therapy session after her mental breakdown, the whole novel is narrated in a confessional tone. Nevertheless, Ai-Lin's confession is never to be expected to be in St. Augustine's mood. Her confession of her incestuous relationship with Philip, of the most absurdly lustful yet sexless relationship with Derek, her only university boyfriend, of her respected, caring and seemingly rational brother's frenetic and incestuous love towards their mother, and of her adulterous relationship with Vince's brother Don is never an act of self-denial and self-condemnation. By revealing her stories, she is not judging what she has been involved in with the same kind of condemnation that most people adopt:

> [...] talking to Felicia doesn't necessarily bring solutions. Even now, my body still sometimes aches for Philip. Incest is a terrible word, a terrible thing in her books. How do I explain to her that Philip was the awakening of passion, which Derek continued and Vince tried to satisfy? (*Chinese Walls*, p. 121)

As a matter of fact, through this act of remembering and revelation, she is not only revealing her secret but at the same time freeing herself from the sense of guilt and self-condemnation with which she has been judging

herself and isolating herself as a punishment for sin. Self-revelation for Ai-Lin is a healing process of accepting her true feelings, arriving at a genuine self-understanding. Only through this is she able to cross a threshold and get the answer for which she has been searching in her life.

Emotional fragile Ai-Lin is transformed into the superficially delicate yet most firm-minded Rose in *Hong Kong Rose*. Being published in the sensitive period 1997, and titled with a loud and highly 'hongkongish' name, the novel has aroused much speculation and interest in how much and how far it alludes to contemporary society and political events. Just like *Chinese Walls*, *Hong Kong Rose* adopts a love story as the framework, and affluent colonial Hong Kong from the 1960s to early 90s as the setting of the novel. Rose, the protagonist of the novel, shares with Ai-Lin her cultural and familial background as a middle class Indonesian *wah kiu* overseas Chinese who later completes her university education in the United States. Rose seems to be a double of Ai-Lin in her experience of an absurd love relationship and chaotic family life with a haunting, lunatic mother, and in her confessional way of revealing her ridiculous life to the readers. Xu Xi has, however, created a sophisticated characterization in this novel. The writer has complicated the character of Ai-Lin and projected a doubling of it in *Hong Kong Rose* separately onto twin sisters. Rose is presented as possessing a totally different personality from that of Ai-Lin. The artistic literature student and romantic love chaser Ai-Lin has retreated from the spotlight and transformed into Rose's marginally existing shadow twin sister Regina, who has driven herself to the edge of insanity in her self-exile in the United States to pursue her romantic American dream of becoming an painter-poet. Rose seems to be just the opposite: at school she

is a typical science student and she is a pragmatic business woman at work. She has no taste for literature and no ear for music. It is only when Elliot has introduced her to the "crimson joy" that she starts to appreciate poetry. Despite her similar experience to Ai-Lin, her cognitive thinking and pragmatic attitude save her from committing herself to the same destructive ends as Ai-Lin. But, subtly, Regina remains her childhood heroine whom Rose admires for doing things she never dares to do herself. Regina is therefore the split conscious and alter ego of Rose. She represents the hidden desire and repressed dream that Rose has no courage to pursue.

The novel is full of Rose's reflection on and memory of her relationship with men like Dad, Paul, Andrew, Elliot, Gordy, and with her twin sister Regina, the most important female in her life. Yet, Rose is surely less fragile and more rational than Ai-Lin from the organized way her memory is presented. Even though the story is presented in a pattern that flickers between present introspection and memory flashback to her childhood, adolescence, university and love life, the presentation is systematic and all the pieces of memory of her different relationships with various characters are coherently linked, unlike the scattering recollections of Ai-Lin. However, the coherence of the narrative never suggests that Rose's life is less chaotic than that of Ai-Lin. There is turmoil behind the superficial calmness which the narrator assumes. What Rose is experiencing is an equally, if not more absurd, relationship. She engages in a seemingly harmonious but in reality hollow and null marriage with Paul. Paul Lie, her childhood sweetheart, the prince charming in all girls' eyes and a young, handsome and rich Eurasian solicitor with a promising future, is a homosexual with a neurotic mood behind his surface calmness. Rose

suffers from his inconsistent attitude and stormy temper when he is struggling with his sexual orientation in the first half of the novel and with the decision of coming out. Rose's marriage with Paul is one of her most tormenting experiences. She is having a half life with her half husband, whom she has to share with Man Yee, the "mistress" of Paul. Her half life with Paul is primarily a superficial and social disguise to cover up Paul's sexual orientation and save his name from public disgrace in the upper class society in Hong Kong; whereas Paul, in return, provides her with vanity, fame, luxury and a social ladder to access to the upper class society.

These turbulences, together with neurotic behavior of her mother and the frequent attempted suicides of Regina, the secretive past of her father as a US-trained pilot and his involvement in arms smuggling, have made the life of Rose more absurd than that of Ai Lin. The ludicrousness in life makes a sharp contrast with the rational personality of Rose and it further marginalizes her and makes her feel out of place even in her own life. It surely distresses Rose, but it does not disable her to a fatal extent unlike the case of Ai Lin. Even though there are a few occasions of fragility for Rose in the novel, as the protagonist she seems able to manipulate the situation and twist it into circumstances which favour her. She is even smart and practical enough to lead a double life. She on one hand enjoys an affluent social life as the beautiful wife of Paul, possessing the blissful façade which this marriage has brought her; and on the other hand, substitutes for her sexless marriage and fulfills her lust through an affair with Elliot, making use of the convenience of the half-life not taken up by Paul. She is a high flyer who builds up a successful career and hides behind this triumphal veneer all her secrets, failures and feelings from the public, and

even from her family. She is just like Ai-Lin before her mental breakdown. Her well-ordered memory, like the way she presents herself inside the story, is a front and a mask that presents only her success and capability and withholds all her true feelings even more from the readers.

Though Rose is free from suffering the symbolic illness of cultural marginality, like Ai-Lin is, there are other hints of allusion to various marginalities in the novel *Hong Kong Rose*. Xu Xi relates numerous symbols, motifs and undertones in her works, with the political schema prevailing in the decolonization era; the political allegorical suggestions in the novels can be easily deduced. First and foremost, it is obvious that the names of the characters are carefully chosen and that they possess richly allegorical and symbolic meanings. "Your name or your person. Which is dearer?" -- the adoption of Lao Tzu's ancient riddle in the prologue of *Daughters of Hui* sheds light on the connotations of names. Ai-Lin, "the girl with no English name"(*Chinese Walls*, p.28), stands out exactly because of her paradoxical situation of having no English name regardless of her westernized, catholic background and her father's adoration of English language and culture. The displacement that her Chinese name has brought her at her missionary school and university life in the US, due to her father's impractical and stubborn insistence of the use of Chinese name despite her westernized background, symbolically reveals the conflicts of the Chinese essence and English culture in her. The price of this inflexibility is *dear*. Without a proper name to be called by in the Western community in which she hangs around during her university time, her *person*, her existence is threatened. "Up till now, only my foreign friends ever ask or manage to pronounce my name correctly" (*Chinese Walls*,

p.106), she reflects. Most people simply make up an English name for her and call her "Alan" for convenience's sake and never bother to ask about the meaning of her Chinese name "Loving Jade". But "Jade", the translation of her Chinese name which Andrew, her boyfriend, adopts for her, only represents a misunderstanding of her personality in another way. "Jade", "the only truly Chinese gem", excites Andrew's oriental fantasy. The artificial emphasis of her exotic quality and Chinese subtleties like jade flatters the manhood and arrogance of the white. The incompatibility of *yin* and *yang,* the Chineseness and the Westernized qualities of Ai-Lin, emerges in her as suffering and mental disorder. Meanwhile, for Westerners it represents her Oriental femininity. The insistence on the use of her Chinese name actually foregrounds her *yang*, her distinctive Chinese essence that she is unable to get rid of and at the same time, unwilling to give up totally in order to submit herself to her *yin*, the western culture that she has adopted but is reluctant to completely conform with.[70]

While Ai-Lin seems to accept that name has to be dearer than the person, Rose, "as sweet by another name" (*Hong Kong Rose*, p.191) represents another attitude towards one's identity. Rose, the name which has been frequently analogized with *Romeo and Juliet*'s line, seems to suggest the practical function of a name. A name will never change the sweetness of a flower; it is given for the sake of identification. Rose chooses to pick up a more practical identity. We find that the novel is highly allegorical and symbolical from the very names of the characters to

[70] The concept of *Yin* and *Yang* is a confusing notion in representing modern East-West relationship. On one hand, traditional Chinese culture always emphasizes China, the Middle Kingdom, to be a nation of *Yang*, i.e. the Sun, whereas the periphery, the West is the *Yin*, i.e. the Moon. On the other hand, they also associate *Yang* with masculinity and *Yin* with femininity. In Said's concept of *Orientalism*, however, the West, the Occident represents the masculine power whereas the East, the Orient, is the feminine power.

the characterization and relationships between them. The American-educated female protagonist, Rose, comments at one point that: "I was used to my role as intermediary between foreign and local [Hong Kong] employees. Speaking good English as well as Chinese and having a Eurasian boyfriend had something to do with it. But I didn't like being so acutely aware of the racial division" (*Hong Kong Rose*, p. 69). This is not a single personal experience that Rose encounters; as a matter of fact, it is the best way to describe the situation of Hong Kong as well as the role which Hongkongers play in the world. No matter whether it arises from geographical or political location, Hong Kong is the threshold of China to the outside world. Since the mid-eighteenth century, Hong Kong has played a crucial role as the doorway where the two major cultures, the Anglo-American and the Chinese, meet. This unique quality on one hand brings this city and its people exposure to various cultures but on the other hand a problematic cultural identity. It is undeniable that Hongkongers have the advantage of experiencing and observing both the Chinese and Western cultures objectively. Nevertheless, it is exactly their detachment from both cultures that results in their rootlessness and identity crisis. With the social and political changes, the identity of Hong Kong people can no longer be defined simply by their ethnicity or by the traditional Chinese Confucian philosophy. In her second novel, *Hong Kong Rose*, Xu Xi has tried to make use of her symbolical presentation of characters to illustrate the formation of the special Hong Kong identity in its ideological, cultural and linguistic aspects. Xu Xi devotes special effort to the description of the psychological aspect of Hongkonger identity. Through the problematic relationships of the characters in the book, the novelist reveals her love-

hate relationship and the entanglement with this identity which is perplexing and yet fascinating.

In this novel, Rose Kho and her family are the representation of the typical ethnic Chinese community in Hong Kong: they have a vast exposure to various cultures. Xu Xi, through Rose Kho's family and Ai-Lin's connections, explores the cultural multiplicity and notion of ethnicity of her city. On the surface, "ethnicity", "ethnic group", "ethnic" and "ethnic identity" seem to be words of clear and concrete meaning; however, they are amongst the most complicated words that have aroused the attention of philosophers, social scientists, psychologists and anthropologists. The ethnicity of the majority Chinese community in Hong Kong becomes complicated as ethnicity is not simply defined by one's race but also by one's culture. Through Ai-Lin's connections and her doubt about her origin (whether she is from Indonesia or Fukien), the writer examines the inclusiveness of Chinese ethnicity. The family acquaintances like the Hokkien accented store clerk from the pharmacy, the native Shanghaiese Mrs Yue the jeweler, the Mandarin speaking Far East Restaurant owner Mr Huang, and the Cantonese cook Ah Yee all speak different dialects and have different origins. To Ai-Lin, who neither speaks Cantonese with funny accents nor originally comes from any Chinese provinces, they seem to share no common background with her. But her mother's insistence that they are all their connections makes Ai-Lin confused:

> The man speaks funny Cantonese, and Mum says that's because he's from Fukien, like us. I thought we were from Indonesia but Mum says our family was originally from Fukien, which doesn't make much

> sense to me. But I don't speak funny Cantonese, and neither do my brothers. It's only our parents who do (Chinese Walls, p.8).

Chinese ethnicity seems to be an inclusive concept that goes beyond languages (dialects), cultures and origins. The Khos represent the ambiguous ethnic identity of Hong Kong people which cannot be defined by one word, "Chinese", alone. According to Manning Nash, there are building blocks which help to construct one's ethnic identity: "the building blocks of ethnicity have been the *body*...a *language*...a *shared history and origins...religion...nationality*"[71]. Amongst all these building blocks of ethnicity, the *body* is the most obvious and the most inflexible outward marker of one's ethnicity. It refers to "a biological component expressed as blood, genes, bone, flesh, or other common 'substance' shared among group members"[72]. Even though all the Khos are racially Chinese, they do not really share the same Chinese culture: Mr. Kho has worked in America before the war, whereas Mrs. Kho is a Chinese-Indonesian, and Rose's Uncle is a Chinese-Malaysian. Truly, the external physical marker, such as one's skin color and lineage, is the essential element for identifying one's race and defining one's racial identity; but it is inadequate in constructing one's ethnicity completely. The Chinese racial quality of Rose's family offers them similarity but not identity.

Xu Xi's Hong Kong Rose cannot gain a substantial identity through her Chinese heritage, and neither can she be defined culturally:

> I often spoke to my father in Mandarin, since he disliked Cantonese and claimed he already spoke too much English at work. Regina and Mum wouldn't

[71] Manning Nash, *The Caldron of Ethnicity in Modern World*, pp.5-6.
[72] Ibid, p.5.

> speak Mandarin, mostly because Mum spoke it with an embarrassingly pronounced accent; they almost always spoke English at home, mixed with a little Cantonese, although my mother sometimes lapsed into Indonesian. (*Hong Kong Rose*, p.47)

In order to construct a collective identity for a community, it is necessary for this group of people to possess a shared culture and experience. Ironically, Xu Xi pinpoints and magnifies to her readers the core cause of the identity crisis of Hongkongers in this description of daily communication within Kho's household: there is no shared language in the family. Hong Kong people, just like the members of the Kho family, fail to construct for themselves a collective identity because of the non-existence of their basic linguistic tie. Even worse, Xu Xi reveals from the Khos' linguistics practice that Hong Kong people are actually living on borrowed cultures: they speak English and Mandarin which are not their own languages. Therefore, they are defined by their racial heritage, and at the same time by the cultures they borrow. They are the "hyphenated Chinese", ambivalent in their identity.

Although Hong Kong suffers from the lack of a real concrete identity, Hongkongers are tough in coping with the conflicts amongst various cultures, identities and problems that they are facing by applying the ideology of pragmaticism. It is undeniable that there is still a strong nostalgic feeling towards Chinese traditions, values and philosophical thinking, such as Confucianism, in the ethnic Chinese community in Hong Kong, especially amongst the older generation. Rose's father simply adjusts his highly valued Chinese traditions when it comes into conflict with the practice of the multi-cultural society which he is living in.

> Despite his sometimes old-fashioned ideas about women, he really did want me [Rose] to break away from depending on family, even if it meant working...he was simply a pragmatist: as long as a wife could work and still be a mother and homemaker, the way Mum was, it meant extra income" (*Hong Kong Rose*, p.12).

Xu Xi uses the image of food and cooking, one of the notable markers of ethnicity according to many sociologists, to demonstrate this confusing but common cultural phenomenon in both the Kho household and the Hong Kong society:

> "He burned the bottom of my pressure cooker!" Mum recalled, laughing. "What a mess that time – you'd just left for America, Rose. But now he makes good *bami goreng* and *chow ho fun,* you know, the dry kind, with sliced beef. Oh, and linguini with white clam sauce." Noodles of every kind – Indonesian, Chinese, Italian – had always been his favorite food.
>
> So life back home was a constant feast. "Rose, you want some lumpia? With fresh chilli?" Dad liked everything *laat*, spicy hot, especially his Indonesian spring rolls in plain, unfried pancakes, packed full of meat and vegetables, which absorbed the stinging bite of the tiny red and green chilli. The bigger the bite, the greater the pleasure of consumption. When it came to food. Dad had an international, not Chinese, palate. (*Hong Kong Rose*, p.43)

Hong Kong is, just like the pressure cooker in the novel, or the mixing bowl used for cooking, trying to mix, melt and integrate cultures from different nations, countries and societies, and preparing them ready for the acceptance, consumption and the absorption of its people. And in fact, this "multi-cultural food" becomes the nutrients and the essence of life which nurtures Rose and all the younger generation who were born and bought up

in the city.

On the other hand Paul Lie, Rose's husband, is exactly the embodiment of the "prestigious" colonial Hong Kong identity. Apart from exploring the problematic cultural and racial identity experienced by most Hong Kong dwellers, Xu Xi examines the identity issue of colonial Hong Kong from a political perspective. With a socially important Chinese father "who is one of the few Chinese barristers in Hong Kong" (3) and a Eurasian mother who speaks "Queen's English" (4), the writer creates Paul as the personification of Hong Kong, the product of special political and historical incident. Paul and his family represent the political identity which colonial Hong Kong society is adopting. They speak English and try to adopt a western colonial style of living to make themselves superior to other members of their own race: "their Chinese servant, complete with a white and black samfoo and waist length pigtail, served Western style, with an array of silverware too elaborate for the meal" (4). Hong Kong has become unique and "superior" with its special political identity. Yet, Paul's Eurasian heritage is not obvious as "he looks almost completely Chinese" (15), whereas Paul's father looks less Chinese simply because of a "rather brown complexion [which is the result of ] being in the sun" (3). The colonial identity, just like Paul's appearance and Paul Senior's complexion, is superficial, artificial and transient; it cannot provide Hongkongers with an emotionally and psychologically charged identity.

Moreover, this identity lingers only on the social and material levels and at the same time it is a luxury that few people can really afford. Instead of describing the intimate familial life as she has done for Rose's family, Xu Xi chooses to emphasize Paul's family's social life and their fashion

senses and tastes. Paul embodies the fame and reputation which satisfy the vanity of materialistic Hong Kong. He presents only the image of the luxurious, superficial side of a social life which he needs "his well-educated and by now much more sophisticated girlfriend [who can] accompany him to the social functions a young solicitor ought to attend in Hong Kong" (6). It is just like the "Girard Peregaux watch" that Marion (Paul's mother) gives Rose, which is "ladylike and delicate, tastefully expensive...elegant" (30) but of no concrete use.

Because of the entrapment between the two cultures, the identity of Hong Kong is marginalized. Xu Xi suggests ways of defining Hong Kong people's collective identity on a psychological and emotional basis. Interestingly enough, Xu Xi uses the homosexual orientation of Paul to symbolize this cultural dilemma. Both of the lovers of Rose and Ai-Lin in the two novels have undergone a period of biological-psychological struggle, and are eventually determined to be gay. Philip's and Paul's sexual orientation and evolution connote the cultural significance of the pluralism and complexity of the city. Philip's exotic appearance and Paul's Eurasian heritage are themselves the embodiment of tension between the Occidental and Oriental qualities in Hong Kong as represented by the struggle between the masculinity and femininity of Paul and Philip. The subtle yet delicate description of Philip's bisexual transformation gives a precise touch to the cultural in-betweenness of the city. The author of *Chinese Walls* displays another taboo, incest, together with this sensitive queer issue, to explore what is socially taboo in the cultural ambiguity of Hong Kong. Philip's masculinity, just like his Westernized appearance and beautiful English accent, makes him stand out in the Chinese community in

Hong Kong. There, he is treated as *jaahp jung* and is admired for his exotic masculine charm. Nevertheless, his "Western-ness" loses its brightness when he goes to the United States, where the Western culture is at home and predominates; and so does his masculinity. However, even in Hong Kong, the masculine sexuality of Philip is a superficial one, just like his Western appearance. His manhood and masculine sexual orientation is expressed and exhibited only through an absurd, abnormal incestuous relationship with Ai-Lin. His masculinity, in this unspeakable relationship, is therefore repressed, unknown and unrecognizable. As a result, his premature, feeble masculinity together with his phony Westernized cultural identity are outshone, shaken and overthrown when he is exposed to the defining masculinity of Occidental culture.

While Philip represents the involuntary collapse of the harmony of cross-cultural identity and the feeling of cultural ambivalence of Hong Kong, Paul denotes the conscious effort in covering up this ambivalence and negotiating the disharmony brought by the inbetween-ness. Their psychological struggle echoes the cross-cultural dilemma of Hong Kong. Xu Xi symbolically uses Paul's secret and sexual orientation to analogize the psychological struggle and the abnormality of colonial Hong Kong identity. Acknowledging Paul's virtues and merits, the novelist arouses readers' poignancy by revealing Paul's secret as being a fostered son: Marion is the mistress of Paul's uncle and Paul is in fact his uncle's son. As with Paul, all the dignity and glory that Hong Kong is claiming have no legitimacy. And in fact, Paul's ambiguous sexuality also signifies Hongkongers' dilemma in choosing between their Chineseness and Englishness. Like Paul, Hongkongers are trapped between the choice of

being a heterosexual and a homosexual, to preserve their socially approved and prestigious external identity and a more psychologically comforting identity, their English political identity or their Chinese ethnicity. However, neither choice provides a possible solution to the identity crisis.

Rose's marriage with Paul is the best illustration of the majority of educated Hongkongers' feelings towards colonial British-Hongkong identity. It provides them with legal security, but in reality it is null. Rose and Paul's marriage makes a perfect match on the surface; yet in reality, they are married only legally. Paul is having "another half life" with his homosexual boyfriend. The security of Hong Kong identity is such that most people are able to enjoy the stability and financial prosperity which the city provides. Yet Rose's feeling towards Paul reveals Hongkongers' entangling love-hate sentiments towards the city. Hong Kong and the Hong Kong nationality, just like Paul, can only gives Rose and Hongkongers "half life" and "half love", which hurt them. This half life can never satisfy Rose, as well as the Hongkongers, emotionally and psychologically. However, as Paul comments,

> Think about it, Rose. It's quite sensible really. We're both sexual creatures. In fact, our lives are defined by our sexuality. We just can't satisfy each other in that regard. But we fit well together socially, even intellectually. Your mother adores me and my father adores you. We both manage quite well in Hong Kong. As our careers progress, we'll be able to travel independently of each other and do what we want out of sight of anyone that matters. And even if there is a little talk, it only helps our image. (*Hong Kong* Rose, p.245)

Though Rose and Hongkongers might be tired of this half, incomplete and

hollow identity, they need it as it offers them convenience and a presentable social identity compared with the other ethnic Chinese groups in the Asian district.

Unfortunately, the giving up of this hollow identity has a high possibility of ending up in self-denial, and even worse, self-destruction. The novelist has tactfully presented Regina and Rose Kho as a pair of twins. Not only does Regina serve as the split self of the female protagonist of the novel, but she also symbolizes the dilemma and internal struggle that most Hong Kong people are facing. Regina represents the liberation from the old and the quest for a totally new identity. Regina's illegal residence and migration to America suggest possible alternatives that Hongkongers can consider. However, Regina's parasitic life relying on the subsidy from her friends reveals the novelist's opinion of the impossibility of such alternatives. Migration can offer, just like Rose and Paul's marriage, a superficial national identity. Nevertheless, Regina is still living in a borrowed culture. With its assimilation, Regina ends up with the denial of her own ethnicity and self-denial. Regina's suicide and lunacy reveals the novelist's idea of the possibility of danger in this quest for identity.

Xu Xi successfully presents in her novels the problematic identity that Hong Kong people face. She brings the problem of cultural marginality into the spotlight, and she is also able to analyze the problems of Hong Kong's identity at various levels, social, ideological, cultural and psychological. She successfully illustrates her people's sense of loss, and at the same time their urgent quest for identity. Most importantly, as a Hongkonger herself, Xu Xi is able to demonstrate vividly the dilemma that her people are facing. She reveals Hongkongers' complex and ambiguous

feelings of love-hatred towards their problematic identity.

### Agnes Lam

As with Xu Xi and Louise Ho, Agnes Lam's multicultural background and transnational identity have given her inspiration in her literary creativity. However, what makes Agnes Lam different from the other two Anglophone writers is the fact that her multicultural identity is an adopted one. Unlike Xu Xi and Louise Ho, who inherit their multicultural heritage from their families, Lam acquired her new identity in early adulthood. Agnes Lam was born in a traditional ethnic-Chinese Hong Kong family and raised and educated in the city. She had her first international experience when she did her degree at University of Singapore, and thereafter she continued her studies at Pittsburgh and completed a PhD in linguistics. After her graduation, Agnes Lam has spent about another 6 years teaching in the National University of Singapore, where she has developed her identity as a regional writer. The linguist-poet's work is well received in Singapore and the nearby region, and her poetry has appeared in publications such as Singapore's *Singa* and *Commentary*, and Australia's *Westerly*. She was acclaimed as a Singaporean poet before she returned to Hong Kong in 1990. The poet of *Woman to Woman and other poems* (1997) and *Water Wood Pure Splendour* (2001) is now working as an Associate Professor at the English Centre, The University of Hong Kong.

### Local, Regional to Individual

In her poems, Agnes Lam does not provide explicit discussion of Hong Kong identity. Unlike Xu Xi and Louise Ho, Agnes Lam has made

no attempt to construct for herself a fixed identity as either a local or international Hong Kong writer; on the contrary, she allows her identity to flow fluidly between the realms of international, regional and local while she relocates frequently between America, Britain, Singapore and Hong Kong. She never addresses the issue of cultural, political and national identity directly. Instead, Agnes Lam reveals her sensitivity towards her role as a woman in society. From time to time, she discusses the problem of negotiating and adjusting, perhaps through compromise, her various roles as a woman, a professional, a wife, a daughter(-in-law), a mother (without a child) in the workplace, in society, in both private and public spheres as well as in different cultural backgrounds. Womanhood is a constant theme in her work. The issue of her cross-cultural experience is subtly introduced and revealed. It interacts with her various roles and makes her identity as a woman more perplexing.

As a linguist, Agnes Lam is especially sensitive to the interaction between one's acquisition of a foreign language and the inherited cultural psyche. She has published essays on English writing in Hong Kong and Asia. In recent years, especially after the handover in 1997, Lam's attention has no longer been focused only on Singapore and Hong Kong. She sees writing in English, an international language, as a global trend. As a scholar, she has moved her research base from colonized English speaking Singapore and Hong Kong to non-English-speaking China. Due to its rapid economic growth and the PRC's participation in global trade, there has been a growing demand for English teaching and learning in China. Agnes Lam's research focuses on exploring expressions of an essentially Chinese

cultural psyche in the practical international language.[73] Lam frequently travels between Hong Kong and China, and has published many papers on bilingualism and English Teaching in a Chinese context. Accordingly, the linguist-poet has also turned her cross-lingual-cultural experience into poetic creation and the poems in the second section, "Water Wood Pure Splendour", of her second poetry collection of the same name concern her experience of teaching English in China.

**Post-colonial Chinese National Patriotism**

We notice that there is a drastic change in the poetic themes of Agnes Lam after the 1997 handover. Even though her poems before 1997 do not really explicitly focus on the examination of Hong Kong identity, Agnes Lam's exploration of female roles in a cross-cultural context expresses the poet's ideas about the heterogeneity and fluidity of identity in the contemporary world. Such ideas coincide with Xu Xi's and Louise Ho's perception of the flexible, hybrid postcolonial identity of Hong Kong. Lam's numerous marginal identities as a Singaporean-Hong Konger, and a transnational /cross-cultural bride are in accord with the identity most Hong Kong writers are searching for, one which transcends boundaries. As I have mentioned earlier, this problematic and ambigious, though seemingly disempowering identity is one which Hong Kong writers adopted to express the uniqueness of Hong Kong. The rootlessness of Hong Kong, the ambiguous political and national status, the marginal

---

[73] Books which Agnes Lam published such as *Language Education in China: policy and experience from 1949*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2005) obviously show the writer's shift of interest from English language acquisition to globalizing Chinese identity.

cultural identity are commonly invoked by these postcolonial writers as a means of challenging the identity which has been imposed on them. They use it to vent their disapproval of the imposed colonial identity or Chinese nationality, and to demonstrate their unwillingness to conform to the conventional notion of a fixed identity. By emphasizing its fragmented nature in their literary work, these postcolonial writers have in fact turned this disadvantageous and problematic marginal identity of Hong Kong into an empowering and inclusive hybrid identity which is fluid and without fixed boundary or limitations.

However, it is very obvious that the post-colonial work of Agnes Lam has lost its postcolonial insight as compared with her work before the handover. In *Water Wood Pure Splendour*, Agnes Lam has lost her political detachment, independent spirit and detachment in handling the issue of Hong Kong identity. She has neither Louise Ho's skepticism concerning nor Xu Xi's resistance to Chinese national identity and the new political status imposed on Hong Kong by the two sovereignties. On the contrary, in many poems in her second poetry collection, Agnes Lam shows her readiness and even eagerness to accept and embrace the newly given Chinese identity which has been brought to her by historical events. Indeed, the post-97 work of Agnes Lam exhibits the increase in the poet's self-awareness of her relationship with Hong Kong and her concern for the changes in her city. Not only has the Singaporean-Hong Kong poet become more conscious of her identity as a Hongkonger; but the ethnic-Chinese Anglophone writer has demonstrated her increasing passion for her Chinese identity.

Even though *Water Wood Pure Splendour* is a post-97 publication and

is therefore not within the focus of this thesis, one should never overlook the dramatic change in Agnes Lam's perception of identity at this crucial historic moment. Being one of the major Anglophone writers in Hong Kong, Agnes Lam's view of her city and her relationship with it has definitely influenced the shaping of post-colonial Hong Kong identity. Indeed, the poems written around the period of handover have already revealed the American-Singaporean educated poet's suddenly increased awareness of her status as a Hongkonger, one which she rarely displayed in her earlier works. In the poem "Shanghai Tang" written on 23 March 1997, less than four months prior to the handover, Lam makes use of the change in language policy to describe the decolonizing city's entering into its final stage of preparation for the handover of sovereignty.

> March 31$^{st}$, there will be
> a new radio station,
> the first in Hong Kong
> in Putonghua.
>
> Last night,
> an announcement of a plan
> to restrict the use of English
> as a medium of school instruction.
>
> Two mental notes to file away
> for my research in language education.
> Have I not made prediction before?
> Will I cite their chronology in future?
>
> I wish I were not a researcher,
> a teacher, an administrator.
> That I could listen to the news
> and not its historic implications.

For education, for language change,
the hiatus faced by young people
between school and university,
Hong Kong and the world.

Change there will be.
Change there must be.
Many countries have had them.
Some have fared better than others.

Why should I feel responsible?
What could be better for Hong Kong?
A child born of political assault,
legitimized by a treaty, returned by another.

If only
I could just buy myself
a cheongsam of white silk
from Shanghai Tang in vogue,

wait for 1st July
to ride the tide,
enjoy the scenery
as we cross the century –

*23 March 1997, Minibus 11, Pokfulam Road* [74]

Alongside the description of the changes taken place in Hong Kong, the poet uncovers the changes in her inner state of mind in her own preparation for the handover. It is not difficult to notice that the bilingual poet is stuck in a dilemma. Like Louise Ho and Xu Xi, Agnes Lam feels the burden and is conscious of her responsibility as an intellectual to be skeptical about the political and cultural changes. But she seems personally to welcome the new phase in history. The linguist-poet is torn between her public

[74] Agnes Lam, "Shanghai Tang" in *Water Wood Pure Splendour*.

responsibility and her personal desire. As a scholar educated under the Singaporean and Anglo-American system and a linguist specialising in English language acquisition, Agnes Lam is used to her multiple cultural identity which is often regarded as English-oriented. However, at the crossroad of the 1997 handover, the poet seems to be anticipating a new political identity and a Chinese nationality which the new sovereignty brings to the decolonized city. She has to struggle between her linguistic/cultural identity and her political identity.

However, Agnes Lam's dilemma seems to be solved after the handover. The ethnic Chinese Anglophone poet is able to resolve her split identity by her political patriotism. In the prose poem "The richer the people", Lam attempts to dissolve the political split and territory boundary of Taiwan, Hong Kong and China by invoking a Pan-Chinese cultural identity.

> A large white building with four spacious floors,
> Each devoted to several areas of learning.
> On the first floor near the entrance are
> politics, economics, finance, management,
> history in elegant volumes towards the back.
> Moving up to the second, I find the humanities,
> languages and education. On the side are
> CDs and VCDs for entertainment and learning.
> The third floor offers art, cookery, poetry,
> novels from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan,
> translated works from many different countries.[75]

In this poem, the Beijing Books Centre is a symbol of Chinese culture. Through the detailed description of this books centre in Beijing, the poet displays the broad horizons of Chinese culture which ranges from

[75] Agnes Lam, "The richer the people" in *Water Wood Pure Spendour*.

humanities to sciences and from academic to daily leisure. At the same time, the poet attempts to show the inclusiveness of this Pan-Chinese culture which transcends the territorial and political boundaries of "China, Hong Kong and Taiwan" and is even moving to a globalizing end that reaches "many different countries". As such, the inclusive Pan-Chinese identity which Agnes Lam presents is able to dissolve the political difference between the PRC and Taiwan, and the difference in economic system between Hong Kong and the PRC, and it also helps to resolve her internal struggle between her English linguistic self and her personal wish to embrace Chinese political identity.

> And I know
> the ten-year silence,
> the muteness it left behind
> these twenty years,
> is over.
>
> The Chinese are
> talking again
> in daylight and public spaces,
> diverse voices
> from myriad minds. ("The richer the people")

The poem shows the process of Agnes Lam's identification with Chinese identity. She is readily abandoning a sense of the political difference and alienation of Hong Kong from China by conforming herself to Chinese history and culture.

> Five years ago,
> at the Great Wall,
> I saw the splendor of China,
> its history.
>
> Today,

in the Beijing Tushu Dasha,
I feel our hope,
Our future.

Lam's awakening of her identity of a Hongkonger seems to have taken a step further. The poem shows the political correctness of the poet in facing the historic and political fact that Hong Kong is part of the PRC after the 1997 handover, and therefore, Hong Kong identity is part of the wakening, expanding Chinese cultural identity.

As a matter of fact, Agnes Lam's identification with Chinese nationality is not simply a cultural and historical one. The poem "You say" is the poet's declaration to the readers that her submission to the Chinese authority and embracing of her newly chosen Chinese identity is political and thoroughgoing. The poem was written in 1999 right after the American bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia.

we do nothing right
we abuse human rights,
refuse Tibet independence,
order tanks on unarmed students,

steal scientific information,
export too much, import too little,
pollute the air and rivers,
destroy tropical forests.[76]

Not only does the poet proclaims her Chinese identity in this poem but, being stirred by the Yugoslavia Incident, she also openly expresses her hostile feeling towards and rejection of the US which she once held dear. In another poem "A tragic mistake", Agnes Lam has already expressed her anger and anguish towards the "tragic mistake" the US made in the Yugoslav action:

---

[76] Agnes Lam, "You say", in *Water Wood Pure Splendour*.

You say it was a mistake,
a tragic awful mistake,
that you had intended to bomb
a key site in Yugoslav action
800 metres away. Our embassy
just happened to be in the vicinity.
Would you have said the same
if the British had been hit instead?

You say you had poor intelligence,
wrong location from an old map perhaps,
or the self-directed missiles
recognized the wrong target.
You say you do not know
which planes were involved
since NATO is an alliance
of several different nations.

You expressed regret
but you did not apologize.
You did not send condolences.
Nor did you promise to make amends.
Instead, you say your actions were not barbarous,
that you will not cease your bomb fire.[77]

Such angry feeling and rejection of the US are understandable. Indeed, tragic events like the June-4th Incident, did momentarily raise the self-awareness and the nationalist feelings of many Hong Kong people. However, the political event has completely transformed the poet from a marginal Singaporean-Hongkonger and a Hongkonger-Chinese to a patriotic Chinese.

You say we are communists,
a political nuclear threat,
an environmental time bomb,
a looming economic disaster.

[77] Agnes Lam, "A tragic mistake", in *Water Wood Pure Splendour*.

> But how often do we invade
> other countries in alliance,
> drop bombs on civilians,
> demolish national treasures? ("You say")

Lam's proclamation of her Chinese identity is not merely a cultural and historical one. By declaring herself to be a Communist, she has in a patriotic spirit adopted her identity as a Chinese politically. It is, obviously, a very unconventional and a very striking move for a Hongkonger. Although Hong Kong was returned to the PRC in 1997, under the principle of "One Country, Two Systems", Hong Kong remains as a capitalist society which exercises free market economy. Lam's poem is a gesture which declares her loyalty to the PRC government and also a sign which marks her detachment from her once borrowed Anglo-American identity.

Hence, even though Agnes Lam is one of the major Anglophone writers in Hong Kong, her drastic change in her view of identity as well as her post-97 patriotic declaration of her Chinese identity do not fit into the main argument and the time frame of this research. Chapter Four will therefore be a shorter one as compared with the chapters on Xu Xi and Louise Ho. It will mainly focus on Lam's pre-97 personal and gender identity as a reflection of the linguistic and cultural self of Hong Kong. While Xu Xi is still trying to explore and include all possible attributes of the category of Hong Kong Literature, Agnes Lam has given it an austere, cognitive definition. In her essay on the classification of Hong Kong poetry, Agnes Lam states that Hong Kong poetry can be any poetry written by those who have lived in Hong Kong:

> To summarize, Hong Kong poetry can have at least
> two definitions: one narrower and one broader. The

> first is that Hong Kong poetry is written by poets of Hong Kong origin as defined by place of birth and / or residence during their formative years. The broader definition includes poetry written by poets currently or once based in Hong Kong, as long as they have experienced Hong Kong. *Whether the poetry is about Hong Kong does not seem crucial* (emphasized).[78]

As a linguist, Agnes Lam attempts to define the literary category and her identity as a poet (from Hong Kong or elsewhere) using a linguistic and cognitive approach rather than a thematic approach. This can be revealed from the content of her poems in which, unlike those of Louise Ho, the Hong Kong-Singaporean poet is not keen to answer questions of identity in her poems. What she says in the essay throws light on her view of the identity of a poet:

> The key is mutual identification between one poet and other poets and between a poet and his or her readers. Because poetry is communicative act, a poet cannot be considered a Hong Kong poet unless the poet is accepted by Hong Kong readers.[79]

Since she is a Hongkonger by birth and her poetry is well received by both Singaporean and Hong Kong readers, Agnes Lam is simultaneously granted two identities as both a Singaporean poet and Hong Kong one. However, unlike most Hong Kong writers who find the duality of identity threatens their integrity as local writers, Lam is comfortable with the seemingly contradictory, unstable and incompatible identity of a regional and local, Singaporean and Hong Kong poet. Instead of constructing a more embracing identity and adjusting her voice like Xu Xi and Louise Ho so as to make herself heard by the audience, Agnes Lam moves freely

---

78 Agnes Lam, “Defining Hong Kong Poetry in English: An answer from linguistics” in *Hong Kong English: Autonomy and Creativity*, 183-95, (190).
79 Ibid. 192.

between her various roles and identities. Her individual identity as a poet overrides the various labels imposed on her. She is both local and regional. both a Singaporean and a Hongkonger, a linguist and a poet, a wife, a daughter and a daughter-in-law. All these roles become part of her experience, and enriching sources of inspiration for her poetic creativity. As a poet, Agnes Lam is not eager to create a fixed image and identity of herself for her readers, rather, she is demonstrating her infinite variety and numerous possibilities that she finds in her own unique existence.

**Louise Ho**

Louise Ho shares a similar cultural background with Xu Xi. Though born and bred mainly in Hong Kong, Louise Ho has a profusion of cross-cultural experiences. She has lived in Mauritius, England, and America as well as Australia. Having lived abroad isn't her only cross-cultural experience; her choice of career of teaching and researching English Literature in Hong Kong intensifies this fusion of cultures. Unlike Xu Xi, Louise Ho, the poet of poetry collections *Local Habitation* (1994) and *New Ends, Old Beginnings* (1997), seems to have taken a less intricate route to achieve her poetic ambition. She has committed herself to the academic and literary world since a very early stage of her career. She did her English Literature degrees in the University of Hong Kong and the University of Warwick, England. She started her lecturing career in a university of Hong Kong. She had been an associate professor in the Department of English of The Chinese university of Hong Kong teaching creative writing, Shakespeare, and Renaissance to Modernist poetry, before her recent retirement in Australia. At the same time, apart from her own

creative writing career, Louise Ho actively worked together with Xu Xi and other local writers in promoting Anglophone writings and cultivating new generations of local writers.

Nevertheless, the poet has not followed a smoother path in establishing herself as a Hong Kong writer than Xu Xi. In some respects, the problems that Louise Ho has been facing are at the other extreme; nonetheless, these differences lead to the same end. Nationally and culturally, her identity is more perplexing and marginalized even than that of Xu Xi. Her race, family heritage, education and migration have made her a Chinese, and more specifically and importantly, a Cantonese, a Mauritian, French, English, American and Australian. These further obfuscate her identity politically as being simultaneously the colonized and the colonizer. In her writing career, she has encountered a similar problem of entrapment and contradiction. While Xu Xi finds difficulties in localizing her writings due to her predominant image being that of an international writer, Louise Ho has to fight every constraint of being confined to the stereotypical label of a local writer. Literary critics approve rather than question Louise Ho's Chinese heritage, which is not the case with Xu Xi whose cross-cultural background is magnified. Seemingly, Ho does not have the same problem and need to readjust herself as Xu Xi. Nevertheless, being a local writer limits the scope of readership, and as a result lessens the effectiveness of her works. Scholarly critics like Andrew Parkin, Michael Hollington and Ackbar Abbas all have the tendency to stereotype her as a Chinese writer, while her identity as an Anglophone writer is often depreciated. The political issues of Hong Kong are their focus of attention in these poems while other poetic values of the poems

and the style of the poet are summarily overlooked. Abbas, in "Dialect Without a Tribe" comments that

> English Literature figures in Louise Ho's work somewhat like the *Don Quixote* figures in Pierre Menard's. It is never a question of working in English Literature but rather of re-working the literature. That is why even if the allusions are to English, their meanings get changed by the new context they find themselves in.[80]

Sadly and ironically, this is exactly what the poet has been facing in reality regardless of the poems. Language, in her poems, has been studied for its themes rather than its style. Though there is no doubt that Louise Ho aims to present herself as a Hong Kong writer and represent her city in her writing, the overemphasis on the political themes of the poems, given that she is a Chinese and non-native English writer, discredits and reduces Hong Kong literature, Anglophone writers and the city's identity to a very colonial and Eurocentric level of classification. This very confinement limits the audibility of her poetic voice to the broader readership. The localness imposed on Louise Ho prevents her voice from being heard by an international audience. Louise Ho faces the problem of being disempowered, and we find that "voice" and "voicelessness" is one of the dominating themes in her writing. This will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

At the same time, being a local writer writing in English, just as in Xu Xi's experience, somehow cuts off her connection even with the local Hong Kong audience. Being a professor of English Literature, a specialist in Shakespeare, and Renaissance literature, and an English-writing poet

[80] Ackbar Abbas, 'Dialect Without a Tribe' in Introduction of Louise Ho's *Local Habitation*, p. ii.

further enlarges the gulf between herself and the local community. The subject makes her too 'foreign' and 'intellectual' in the understanding of the general ethnic Chinese community in Hong Kong. While literary critics make her works 'colonized' and foreign by amplifying the locality of the works and the Chineseness of the poet, her use of English and receptivity to English Literature make her works seem 'colonial' and not so 'local' to the local audience of this former colony. So, is she or is she not a local writer? How does Louise Ho try to negotiate the tension and incompatibility between her roles as a local writer and a poet of English poetry? And most importantly, how does she see and interpret the term 'local'? Is being a local Hong Kong writer, as defined by the microscopic view of many literary critics, a confining and disempowering experience? Or is there a macroscopic view of Hong Kong identity which may bring a liberating experience?

**Poetic Dilemma: Writing is Bleak:**

Louise Ho named her first poetry collection which was published in 1994, four years before the decolonization of Hong Kong, *Local Habitation*. Without a doubt, as a Hong Kong writer, she wrote these poems with the ambition of depicting life as a local inhabitant of this oriental city and to portray the vicinity in her works. Many of her poems take Hong Kong as the background and some of them even as the theme. Yet again, what is the definition of the term 'local'? Even though Louise Ho is labeled a local Hong Kong writer, she is not satisfied with confining herself within one small community and writing with a narrow, local communal scope of topics and perspectives; nor is she content with

restricting herself to a rigid, inflexible concept of 'locality'. Indeed, with the fluidity of people in the modern, globalized world, it is impossible for a person of her background to be confined within one place. By reading the subject matters of Louise Ho's poems, it is beyond doubt that the poet is aiming to extend herself, her view as well as her poems, beyond Hong Kong. It is not difficult for readers to notice the vivid use of perspectives in Ho's poems. The poet never tries to portray a static locality in her works. In the collections of poems, her experience in America, Australia and England is juxtaposed with local life in Hong Kong. She links her "local" with the "global". And she tries to resolve the geographical gap of "local" and "foreign" by her skeptical, flexibly local perspectives. She works hard to override the stereotypical label of "local writer", which entails the quality of being Chinese and non-native English speaking, imposed on her by literary critics, and to redefine the characteristics of Hong Kong literature as well as local identity as a whole.

But again, the main problem that Louise Ho as a Hong Kong writer has to face comes from within. Ho faces a dilemma in her writing in that she finds her poetic integrity is threatened by her locality. She has been entrapped in the conflict between her poetic self-manifestation and the receptiveness of her audience. Unlike Xu Xi, who resolves to represent her city to a broad-based global readership, Ho mainly addresses the audience from the local community. Many of her poems, especially those which depict Hong Kong as the background, use the first person pronoun 'we'. The "we"-persona carries a significant meaning in positioning the poet in her home city. On one hand, 'we' shows the inclusiveness of her works and the design of the poet to represent and include her fellow Hongkongers'

views in her poems; on the other hand, it also reflects the bond between the city and herself: she is part of the community. Her means of self-expression, that is, using English as the medium of writing, is incompatible with the needs of this Cantonese speaking community. This discord reduces the authority of her poetic voice and even isolates her from her audience and readers. She exclaims in "Writing is Bleak" that "Writing in this language in this place/Is doubly bleak".[81] This tension is not easily resolvable as it is the fundamental conflict between her role as a poet and as a Hongkonger. She experiences conflict between her Romantic poetic leaning towards a spontaneous outflow of her emotion, and her "mission" as a local writer which she thinks of as her obligation rather than her liking to record the political changes of the city: "to fret/Over the right word/Or the heart/In the right place" given that she is writing in her 'local habitation', for it and about it.

Once again, she expresses in another poem the devastation of being a poet, especially a local one, and proclaims that "poetry is a compromise/ between what the soul desires/ and what the pen cannot give". It is not only a compromise between the mind and the words, it is also an endless confrontation, negotiation and concession between the various expectations of readers and the intention of the writer; "for the healthy/life is a poem,/ for the critic/ ecstasy lies in the next article"[82]. The expectation of the readers and the subject of her poems thwart her from writing freely. Taking politics, social issues and readership into consideration, she becomes a "poet/ who shuffles from kitchen to loo/ biting [her] nails not knowing

---

[81] Louise Ho, "Writing is Bleak" in *Local Habitation.*
[82] Louise Ho, "Poetry Is" in *Local Habitation.*

what to do". The burden of being a "local writer" threatens her poetic integrity, disables her creativity and even endangers her whole identity as a poet writing in English.

**Romantic and Modernist Influences:**

Her literature background and her special preference for Shakespearean literature, Romantic and Modernist poems have undoubtedly influenced the style of Louise Ho's works. To demonstrate her literary heritage from English culture, the multicultural poet has made numerous explicit references and allusions to works which vary from Shakespeare's to T.S. Eliot's. But at the same time, there are also some less noticeable traces of resemblances of some English grand masters' works hidden in the style, language, and structures of her poems. Amongst them, W. B. Yeats's and P.B. Shelley's influences are the strongest. Noting traces of Shelley's and Yeats's influences may lead to misunderstanding of her works; nevertheless, these traces can also serve as the most important evidence in the study of Louise Ho's evolution as a poet.

Having written several poems openly dedicated to Yeats, Louise Ho undoubtedly shows a strong preference for him. Yeats' influences on Louise Ho's works vary from styles to themes and to language. Amongst them, her political poems "Remembering June 4, 1989", "Hong Kong Riots 1967 I & II" bear the strongest resemblance to Yeats' "September 1913" and "Easter 1916", and are therefore inevitably subjected to comparison and criticism. As a result, there is always a tendency for readers to treat Louise Ho as a Yeatsian poet who shares the same political philosophy and tries to borrow Yeats' Irish romantic nationalism to apply to the present

situation of Hong Kong. Nevertheless, Louise Ho is not only a Yeatsian on a superficial level nor is she a poet writing poems of clichéd political themes. It requires a more detailed study in order to fully appreciate Yeats' influence in the style and Ho's Yeatsian views in her poems. I will give a detailed discussion of Louise Ho's view on Hong Kong and Yeats' nationalist Ireland in Chapter Four. Indeed, Louise Ho is a Yeatsian not because of her political views, but rather because of her aestheticism and metaphysical perspectives.

She echoes and answers Yeats' belief in beauty in "He Tells of the Perfect Beauty". The beauties she depicts with "chin slightly titled,/ A face flanked by yellow braids,/ Her eyes held in the distance./ Botticelli's mistress, sister of Amerigo Verspuci" or of "Polish-German stock, an American./ Is she her parents' child/ Or Venus's double"[83] are strong and powerful reminders of Yeats's Muses and the beautiful femme-fatale Irish nationalist heroine Maud Gonne. The local poet has incorporated the Yeatsian archetypical beauty and art into her works, and at the same time, she is extending her poetic experiment to fulfill her ambition of "art for art's sake". Poems like "Well-spoken Cantonese", "Soliloquy of A White Jade Brooch" and "Apprehension of Beauty" are all Louise Ho's ambitious attempts to explore the realm of Yeats' aestheticism and beauty. Her exploration of aestheticism goes beyond mere observation and description. She tries to find out the truth by questioning and expounding the meaning of beauty: "How praise the beauties of a gracious man/ Except that they are the graces of a beautiful man?"[84] At the same time, her search for beauty

[83] Louise Ho, "After Yeats", *Local Habitation*.
[84] Louise Ho, "Well-Spoken Cantonese" in *Local Habitation*.

does not stop at the shallow discussion of appearance. In the poetic prose "Apprehension of Beauty" her pursuit further extends to a philosophical discussion of life and existence:

> Apprehension of beauty is pain. It is in the nature of beauty to hurt when apprehended. I loved your beauty, noted your rare grace and was hurt by both.
>
> In my own timing, in my own way, I have come into my own through celebration of another's existence.[85]

At the same time as Yeats himself is a Shelleyan, it is quite easily detectable that Louise Ho sometimes also resorts to Romanticist belief. The belief in beauty, nature and freedom soothes the tension and torment that she suffers in writing in the modernizing perplexing Hong Kong society and empowers her to advocate poetic integrity. In the poem "Meeting", Ho echoes Shelley's "Ozymandias" in lamenting the absurdity of life and the situation of Hong Kong and reflecting on her own powerlessness and inadequacy in controlling life. The tone of irony and the melancholic mood of being torn between artistic immortality and transient mortal life in Shelley prevail through the whole. While Ho's Shelleyan perspective on life, art and aestheticism, and immortality distracts from Louise Ho's belief in herself in her short, trivial "Meeting" with the man from Mainland, Shelley's wind rescues her from the crisis of creativity. Shelley's "wide West Wind", in this poem comes from the North.[86] And the "lyre" that Shelley transformed into has become the "distant flute" she heard.[87] It is

[85] Louise Ho, "Apprehension of Beauty", in *Local Habitation*.

[86] Due to the geographical situation of Hong Kong, North or North-western winds are blowing from the colder regions of China to the territory in Hong Kong.

[87] Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" Part V: "Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is: / What if my leaves are falling like its own?/ The tumult of thy mighty harmonies / Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,/ Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce, My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!"

the soothing agent that not only gives her power to write in English in a bleak place like Hong Kong, but also enlightens her concerning "man's impermanence and all his arts".

In this way, Louise Ho is also a metaphysical poet who believes the key to aestheticism lies in understanding and answering the philosophical riddle of her existence and identities in this globalized modern world, in the multi-cultural society and in the decolonizing Chinese-ethnic colony. She uses her rigorous and energetic language, skeptical and paradoxical images and unconventional conceits to investigate her metaphysical concerns. As did Yeats, she projects her ideals onto "the new Byzantium".[88] At the crossroad of 1997, Louise Ho realizes Yeats' Byzantium is approaching its end. She determines to look for her new Byzantium, in the new millennium, by sailing in air. With the decolonization of Hong Kong, Louise Ho wishes to see her new Byzantium as a new postcolonial era, a post-modern society and a globalized world.

**Poetry is *NOT* a Compromise:**

After an interval of 3 years, Louise Ho presents a more sophisticated and confident view of herself as a poet in her second poetry collection published in 1997. Perhaps, from the title *New Ends, Old Beginnings*, readers are able to gain a glimpse of the changes in the poet and her resolutions to her problems. While she expresses her anguish at entrapment in the conflicts of her various roles and frustration in making unwilling compromises in her works which threatens her poetic integrity, this volume is neither a demonstration of her reconciliation with the conflicts nor an

---

[88] Louise Ho, "Jet-lagged in Boston" in *Local Habitation*.

adjustment and integration of her numerous roles. The paradoxical title reveals Louise Ho's skeptical yet enlightened view of Hong Kong, the world, herself and even life as a whole. By alluding to T.S. Eliot's line "In my end is my beginning" in the title of her book, not only does the poet more outspokenly impart her viewpoint on the 1997 handover of Hong Kong compared with the neutrally and discreetly titled *Local Habitation*, but she is also boldly and unequivocally proclaiming herself as a modernist poet. In the very title, Ho successfully adopts a modernist skeptical view in pinpointing the paradoxical situation of 1997, decolonization and the period of neo-colonialism, regression and progression, old and new, as well as the ends and beginnings that Hong Kong is entrapped in by the tricks of history and politics. Besides, there is no lack of examples of the echoes of Eliot, Yeats and Pound in Louise Ho's works. While the images of "dust" and "deluge", used to present her disappointment in the future generations in "Summer at Warwick", reiterate Eliot's cynical view of the dryness and hollowness of modern civilization in *The Waste Land*, her glorification of beauty in "After Yeats", "Apprehension of Beauty" and other poems strongly reminds readers of the aestheticism of Yeats. At the same time, Louise Ho is a strongly visual poet. The vivid use of the image of the sculpture which is a headless combination of a horse's torso and a human one in "Bronze Horse" visualizes the oddity of the political "metamorphosis" of 1997 that is exactly like "two bodies/countermining,/ two contraries/ forced into one orbit: the unseen body, fully in control,/ meets the unseen head,/ losing control,/ at the neck/ of a bronze horse".[89]

Not only has Louise Ho applied this skeptical modernist perspective

[89] Louise Ho, "Bronze Horse" in *New Ends Old Beginnings*.

to her poems about Hong Kong and the world, but she has also made use of this viewpoint in tackling the tension between various dimensions of roles and styles cramped in her works, as well as in her identity. Instead of being torn by the tensions and struggling for a compromise as she has done in *Local Habitation*, Louise Ho does not see such a need of making any kind of compromise in the incompatibilities of her various identities and styles in the second volume of her works. Her reference to Yeats and her works on the political situation of Hong Kong have inevitably led readers and critics to take her as a political poet and even a mimic of Yeats's ambition by promoting literary "nationalist" and patriotic feelings of Hong Kong in her poems. However, Louise Ho is neither a political poet who aims to attract attention by associating herself with politics and expounding acute political viewpoints in her works, nor is she an imitator who blindly copies Yeats's style in her writings. As a Hongkonger who experiences this globally concerned historical moment of political change, Louise Ho's discussion of politics is merely one of the many topics of her everyday life. At the same time, the condemnation of her poems as a pastiche of those of Yeats's discredits the values and limits the flexibility of understanding of the poems: her works may echo Yeats's ideas, but it is rather an intellectual discussion than a total agreement and reiteration.

Louise Ho has, however, become more enlightened if not optimistic in facing these misunderstandings from the audience and tensions created by her background and multiplicities. In *New Ends, Old Beginnings*, Louise Ho makes neither the slightest attempt to resolve the conflicts between her different roles, nor to harmonize these incompatibilities by categorizing them into various sections from a wish of integrating them into one

consistent style, as she did in her first published book. In this second volume, she exhibits the strength of the looseness and lack of unity of style in her poems, resulting from her scattered identity, and preserves this fragmentation as the unique style of her works. Discomfort may still be there, but all bitterness and frustration are gone: "Out of all that and more emerges/ A structure of meaning in words/ Sometimes known as poetry."[90] In spite of the "disjointed sinews", "twisted guts" and all the obstacles that threaten her poetic integrity, the resolve and confidence of a poet are shown in the ease of her tone, spontaneity and casualness of her style and precision of her language. She takes pride in the variety of her identities and turns this into her advantage. She leaves the juxtaposition of all these fragments of her various selves to fill up and mend the gaps and tensions created and torn by labels imposed by critics and readers. She expounds this idea in a lighthearted, playful "singsong" way in "Hopscotch down the corridor":

> Fill the parasitic gaps
> With guttural plosives
> Grind your aesthetic principles
> On the fulcrum of necessity
> Measure Li Po's moon
> And compare it with Donne's sublunaries
> Come and join the fray
> Ducdame ducdame[91]

The poet has come to the resolution that there is no boundary for her assertion of her creativity and her poetic integrity is not to be restrained by forms, cultures, languages and identities. Not only does she use her imagination and language to transcend the confinement of the physical

[90] Louise Ho, "Discomfort" in *New Ends, Old Beginnings*.
[91] Louise Ho, "Hopscotch down the corridor" in *New Ends, Old Beginnings*.

world, as Donne and Li Po do, but she also uses creativity to transcend the rigid inflexible cultural, linguistic and generic boundaries, and moves fluidly between Li Po, the grand master of Chinese poetry who is famous for his talent, the fluidity of his style and yet the poignancy of his language, and John Donne, the poet of metaphysical poems. She is aiming to present an utmost form of art in her poetry.

# CHAPTER THREE

## *Postcolonial Writings of the Last Bastion of Colonialism - The Anglophile Inertia*

### I. Time, Change, Nostalgia and Attachment to the Past in Hong Kong

The reader of Toni Morrison's novels, like *Sula* and *Beloved*, can often hear traditional Afro-American musical and poetic prayers and religious rituals like a chanting motif hidden in the background, yet supporting the development of the plot. Similarly, in N. Scott Momaday's "The Way to Rainy Mountain", the writer takes readers on a spiritual journey back to ancient Kiowa Indian history and mythological past which is paralleled with a physical journey to the ancient origin-site of the ancestors near Rainy Mountain. History and revisiting of the past seem to be among the most important keys leading to the recovery of the problematized identity for racially and culturally marginalized ethnic minorities and colonized subjects in postcolonial literary works. Hong Kong, facing its decolonization, shares the same sense of urgent need to reclaim its past, in so far as it looks for an ancestral homeland to root itself in and construct for itself a postcolonial identity.

However, as has been mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter One, the special situation of Hong Kong's decolonization has aroused a complicated feeling amongst its people towards the past. Due to the unusual colonial past as well as the unprecedented historic event of transfer of sovereignty from capitalist Britain to communist China, Hong Kong people are very sensitive to time and change. Their perception of the past

and future has some unique features. As Hong Kong is to reunite with PRC and to return to a communist regime, to the people of Hong Kong, the future is full of uncertainty and fear. It directly affects their attitude to the past. While most colonized subjects resolve to revisit the past and the cultural homeland in order to claim back their lost traditions and rebuild their cultural identity, Hong Kong people have a confused feeling towards their past and its relation to their present. It is a mixture of love and hatred, anticipation and anxiety. On the eve of the handover, the urgent need to preserve the past intensified and Anglophone writers like Xu Xi and Louise Ho chose to re-examine the past in their works. All these works show a strong attachment to the past, though in different forms. This attachment is presented as a nostalgia for an idealized, semi-imaginary past in Xu Xi, resistance to change in Louise Ho and the wish to conserve the present in Agnes Lam. So, how do the historical experiences of the city contribute to such atypical feelings and perception of the past among its people? And what form does nostalgia take in Hong Kong?

As Hong Kong is to be returned to China, the timeline of Hong Kong is upset. The decolonization and ending of its dependent colonial status, instead of progressively leading Hong Kong to a new post-colonial era, is a regression that links Hong Kong's future to its past. Moreover, not only does this decolonization bring Hong Kong back to its past by bringing back a former sovereignty to the decolonizing city, it also brings Hong Kong back to re-experience the era of "colonization", though in a different form, all over again. The rule of China marks a new era and new form of colonization of Hong Kong by China, and of economic domination by Western powers. The fact that the contemporary China is under a

Communist regime makes the return to the past doubly undesirable. It makes the concept of Hong Kong's past and history problematic. The past, that is, the rule of China, is brought back, but at the same time, this new rule is not entirely the same as Imperial Chinese rule. What is more, the new status quo of a modernized, westernized Hong Kong brought by British rule is placed under threat. And Hong Kong faces the perplexing situation of the overlapping of old and new, as well as of two levels of past. This situation is best illustrated by Louise Ho's paradox "new ends, old beginnings".

Not only has this imposed decolonization directed Hongkongers' awareness to their past, so that they have a better understanding of their new identity, but historical events such as the Civil War, and the June-Fourth Tiananmen Incident have also heightened their worries and fear about the past. Their decolonization was not self-determined, but rather a decision imposed by two sovereign powers, i.e. Britain and China. So, apart from arousing the fear of Hongkongers about the past, the undesirable decolonization has also heightened their consciousness and anxiety about change and the passage of time. There is a mixture of a sense of urgency due to the approaching of the Handover and a sense of willed inertia and resistance to changes. This also gives rise to the split perceptions of the "past" of Hong Kong: the colonial past to which most Hongkongers have developed some feeling of attachment, and the ancestral Chinese past, once lost but now re-linked to a future with which Hong Kong people are afraid to be associated.

Time, therefore, is one of the crucial elements that decolonizing Hong Kong has to confront in order to find a way of building its new postcolonial

identity. Edwin Thumboo, a postcolonial scholar and Anglophone writer of Singapore where there has been a similar, if not more intensive, experience of colonization and multiculturalism, notes the crucial role history and time play in postcolonial writing and the construction of an identity for the decolonized:

> The past as an ample, contemporary, living force, inheres in the language, thought and gesture a people share consciously or unconsciously. Moreover, enlightenment and prejudice are simultaneously present in whatever holds them together. It initiates homogeneity, a point noted later through the challenges it poses to and in multiracial societies. Its elements, by which society encodes and transmits itself, make for an identity, a set of reflexes whose diversity in time, in place are nourished by and return to common roots. From this collective mosaic, the individual derives his images of the past, based on the drive of his preferred interests and the perceptions they generate. Similarly with the writer who is moved by the pulse of his experience and his view - at any given point - of those forces he considers crucial in the shaping of his society and its destiny.[92]

Yet, time seems to be playing a trick on the colony. For subjects in colonies, what they need to confront is not the simple sense of time, but time in various forms and disguises. And according to Thumboo, history and past can be both private and public possessions which, respectively, are presented in syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions.[93] Indeed, Xu Xi and Louise Ho explore different aspects of time, the present, past and

---

[92] Edwin Thumboo, "Notes on a Sense of History" in *The Writer's Sense of the Past*. Ed. Kirpal Singh. NUS: Singapore University Press, 1987: 223-233.

[93] According to Edwin Thumboo in "Notes on a Sense of History", the syntagmatic or horizontal dimension of the past provides substantial common ground of a general history without which mutual access to the paradigmatic or vertical sense of the past would be difficult if not impossible.

future, in both a traditional linear way and a modernist circular movement. They present Hongkongers' entanglement with time, especially the past, in the forms of history, memory and dream. Memory is the more personal and private version of the past. It plays a very significant role in anti-colonization as it represents the collective memory of the colonized subjects which is free from influence, interference and reinterpretation by the colonizer. It counteracts "history", which is the official version of the past imposed on the colonized subjects by the colonial government. Official history imposed by the colonizer tends to repress the ethnicity and cultural uniqueness of its colonized subjects in order to prevent the awakening of nationalist sentiment and unity. Dream, which for psychoanalysis emanates from repressed desires and the unconscious, represents the subconscious cultural identity, the forbidden memory of the suppressed past and the hidden nostalgia of the colony in postcolonial literature.

Indeed, due to fear of the uncertainty of the future and resistance to change, nostalgia is one of the strategies on which postcolonial writing chooses to focus. The root *nostos* of the word "nostalgia" means "a return to home"; the notion of nostalgia, therefore, emphasizes the desire to return to the past, to one's origin. However, in the postcolonial literary context, nostalgia is not simply a disease of homesickness and a physical attachment to a location. It is "distinctly modern and metaphorical. The home we miss is no longer a geographically defined place but rather a state of mind."[94] It is a retreat to private life and a personal past when one loses

[94] Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw, "The Dimension of Nostalgia" in *Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia,* p.1

faith in the possibility of changing one's public life and the public sense of present and history. As a matter of fact, the sense of the past presented by orientation to nostalgia is mainly subjective, which reveals another dimension of authenticity. As in the case of Xu Xi, which I will discuss in detail in the last section of this chapter, nostalgia is not an attachment to the past as such; rather, it is a reaction to the historical past motivated by the future which has evolved from it. Xu Xi's personal past is a highly idealized semi-imaginary past. The past in her novels is constructed to uphold the truer values of the past which no longer exists (which might have never existed) in order to oppose this to the deteriorating values of the present. Her nostalgia is a rhetorical strategy to renounce history and reality and replace it with her ideal. Xu Xi and Louise Ho present different perspectives on this postcolonial notion of time and its relationship with Hong Kong in their works. While Louise Ho chooses to capture a conscious recollection of history and presents the vertical dimension of the past in her poems, Xu Xi retreats to a nostalgic, unconscious, personal memory of the past. In this chapter, the focus will fall on Xu Xi's work in analyzing her unique form of narration of time. The competition of the two versions of past, colonial history and communal memory, is rather like a trap which arouses fear, confusion and pain that Hong Kong people need courage to face, confront and break through in order to control and create their own future.

## II. Xu Xi: Time as a Trap

As in many postcolonial literary writings, the notion of memory, the subtle revelation of nostalgic thoughts going with fear of the past to which

they are directed, prevail in the works of Xu Xi. Though disguised as love stories about cosmopolitan Hong Kong heroines' quest for their identity in family, marriage and society, Xu Xi's novels can be read as allegories of the identity crisis that Hong Kong, the Chinese-born but Western-brought up city, is facing. It is noticeable of Xu Xi that she writes her novels with a specific time reference. Not only do her novels reveal a vivid image of the speedy economic booms and prosperous life of Hong Kong during the 1960s-1980s – the temporal setting which the novelist adopts – but the background of the stories also subtly discloses the underlying ideological and political changes taking place in the city. The novelist's consciousness of time can be explained by the sensitive period in which she wrote her first and second novels, *Chinese Walls* and *Hong Kong Rose*, which were first published in 1994 and 1997 respectively. Time, in fact, has a special meaning for Hong Kong people. The books were published in the pre-97 period, the time when Hong Kong was standing at the cross-road of history entrapped by both the past and future. The past, the colonial history, brings a problematic and perplexing identity to Hong Kong and yet the future, the sovereignty of Communist China, simply deconstructs this existential identity of Hong Kong people without providing them with a secure and predictable future. Time, the past and the future, therefore plays a crucial role in both threatening and constructing the existing identity of Hong Kong. The notion of time prevails in the two novels in various forms and images: dream, memory and biographical writings. Interestingly enough, with the gap of three years in between the publication of *Chinese Walls* and *Hong Kong Rose*, Xu Xi's perspective and mood towards time change, as revealed by the resolutions made by her two female protagonists. Like the

general temporal atmosphere both within and without the novels. the style of the novelist is also changed by her colonial and decolonizing experience.

## Two Systems of Time and Memory in the Plots

Time is one of the most crucial elements discussed in studies of postcolonialism. We find that postcolonial time resides mainly in the past; the orientation is to history and memory. Aristotle characterises human memory as a "state or affection of one of these conditioned by lapse of time.... It is a function of the primary faculty of sense-perception... whereby we perceive time."[95] The ancient philosophical understanding of the nature of memory is that it should be based on something we have experienced. When "we are recollecting [our memory], we are experiencing certain of the antecedent movements until finally we experience the one after which customarily comes that which we seek."[96] Nevertheless, the modern concept of memory has become complicated and problematized. Memory is not considered to derive straightforwardly from experience, and the act of remembering is not considered to be a solely personal act which proves the existence of an individual soul. Edward Said, in his essay "Invention, Memory and Place", has tried to redefine modern memory in a postcolonial context as a memory which "touches very significantly upon questions of identity, of nationalism, of power and authority", pointing out that "the art of memory for the modern world is both for historians as well as ordinary citizens and institutions to be used, misused and exploited...rather than [being] something that sits inertly there

[95] Aristotle. *Memory*. 2-3
[96] Ibid. 4

for each person to possess and contain."[97] As power and ideology are involved, memory no longer belongs to us as something personal and individual; in fact, it has become a means of asserting power and of shaping and constructing ideas in order to achieve a certain desirable end. Memory is therefore stressed more for its function than its authenticity. It has, in the colonial and postcolonial eras, evolved and become refashioned into history and collective memory, of which the former is used by the authority to consolidate, whereas the latter is used by the colonized to liberate themselves from colonial rule and domination.

Like the work of many postcolonial writers, Xu Xi's stories adopt the method of juxtaposing two different systems of time, namely major historical time and minor private, circular time. Feldman, in the article "Postcolonial Memory, Postmodern Intertextuality: Anton Shammas's Arabesques Revisited", points out that the two senses of time represent opposing embodiments of the East and West. They show the two "different but balancing visions of life and rhythms of time" within the decolonizing territory.[98] This notion of the two systems of time is also applicable to the case of Hong Kong. Just like all colonies, Hong Kong is trapped between colonial historic time and the local communal time. Xu Xi's intentional reference to the historical era of the 1970s and early 1980s of her two novels builds up the major key of time for her stories. This system of time and memory is "linear and endowed with authority, legitimacy and canonicity". It represents public and macroscopic time in the global political context. On the other hand, the memories of the protagonists in the

[97] Edward Said, "Invention, Memory and Place", *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000): 175-92(176).
[98] Yael S. Feldman, "Postcolonial Memory, Postmodern Intertextuality: Anton Shammas's Arabesques Revisited". *PMLA*, Vol. 114, No. 3 (May, 1999). 373-89.

novels, the main stream of time and memory in the stories, is a personal, unstable and circular system of time. It is the minor key of time and a representation of microscopic memory restricted to the private, local and territorial social context.

Unlike what is found in most postcolonial novels, which have a clear frame of historical time, the major key of time is absent except for a few brief and abstract references to time periods in both *Chinese Walls* and *Hong Kong Rose*. The main plots of Xu Xi's novels are dominated by Ai Lin's and Rose's introspective thoughts and personal memory. The writer intensifies the personal and circular qualities of this minor key of time by moving the plots inwards to the psychology and mind of the characters. In so far as this microscopic sense of time symbolizes the territorial history and memory of Hong Kong people, the presentation of the consciousness of thoughts reveal not only the confusion and anxiety prevailing in the territory at the time, but also magnifies Hong Kong people's fluidity, instability and lack of attachment to a substantial, prominent history. The tenuousness of the concrete time frame provided by the major key of time produces looseness and instability in the narratives. Feldman observes that these alternative memories

> [...] can be identified with what postmodernism has called *fragments*, *impressions*, *memoires*, even *alternative scripts*. Postmodernist memories..., work in unexpected ways: allegedly insecure and unreliable, they go forward and sideways, unorthodoxly zigzagging and paganly circling, shuttling back and forth between past and future, forever threatening to destabilizing metamemories, or the canonical memory in a major key.[99]

[99] Ibid. 373-389.

It is commonly found in postcolonial literature that the reference to history as a legitimate time frame balances against the personal time sense of the stories shaped around the protagonists. This sense of historical and cultural past is necessary to give the colonized subjects, who live under an estranged foreign rule and culture, a psychological lineage stemming from a distant origin. It is usually significant as it is a force which gives the colonized people integrity, order and wholeness in their problematic experiences. Nevertheless, the seeming major, macroscopic time frame of the 1970s and 80s dissolves eventually into part of the fragmented narrative and territorial social memory of Rose, Ai Lin and the Hong Kong people. Without having an authentic linear time to link them to a cultural past, the narratives of Xu Xi's novels collapse into a juxtapositions of bits and fragments of thoughts, and the protagonists' memories of various times.

In place of a striving for a balance between the two systems of time, the minor key of time in Xu Xi's stories dominates, pushing the major key of time to the background. But this imbalance is not without a reason, as it exactly pinpoints the competition between the two sets of irreconcilable memories prevailing in the postcolonial territory. According to Said, neither history nor memory is passive and spontaneous: the past events in memories are actively selected. Both history and collective memory are therefore purposely shaped and endowed with political meanings by the colonial state authority and the post-colonialist elites. The coexistence of the personal memory of the protagonists with the blurred historical frame of time reveals the overlapping of the collective memory of the locals and the official memory imposed by the authority, and the endless struggles between the two. History is merely a form of public and official memory

which helps the state to unite its people and implants in its people common thoughts and beliefs. It is an agency and a tool which the colonial authority manipulates in order to exercise its sovereignty over its colonized subjects. Official memories in most colonial territories, such as Palestine, promote political understanding of the repression of nationalist feelings, knowledge of the present and a remedy for displacement in the colonial experience. In the case of decolonizing Hong Kong, the problematic history of the Opium War and the unfair treaties is emphasized. This is a tactic of the colonial British government and of the PRC government to rationalize the handover of sovereignty in 1997. The past events are tactfully chosen for the purpose of constructing a future desired by the political authorities. Public history becomes governmental justification of a decision on the future sovereignty of Hong Kong in which the territory has no rights of self-determination. History is thus a public memory invented by the imperialistic power which the people of the decolonizing territory have to confront. By distancing the historical frame of time in her novels, Xu Xi is trying to undermine the effect of the imposed official history and explore the social reality of the decolonizing territory at the eve of the handover.

In order to explore the social reality of the colonized territory, it is necessary for the postcolonial novelist to recollect a memory which uniquely belongs to her people. The displacement caused by colonial experience is a memory that is shared by the colonized subjects, yet one which the colonial power can never apprehend. Indeed, the recollection and reconstruction of the colonial experience become another version of "history" of Hong Kong. This piece of recollected memory collectively owned by the colonized subjects serves as a force that counterbalances the

public history imposed by the colonizer. Xu Xi has chosen the Post-War experiences and economic prosperity in the 1970s and 80s as they are localized memories, restricted solely to the territory and its people, which can never be aligned with the larger organization of memory imposed by its past, present or future sovereigns. Even though the construction of a sole unique memory for Hong Kong people may suggest hope for the future of Hong Kong people's identity, the collapse of the two systems of time reveals the writer's pessimism about the political changes and decolonization of the city. The minor key of time projected by the localized memory of Hong Kong people fails to overtake the historical time frame of the plot. In fact, the novelist presents the personal memory of the two protagonists as an entrapment which they fail to finally break through. Instead of being like many postcolonialist writers hopeful about the progression of time, Xu Xi simply finds Hong Kong becoming detached and isolated from any historical and cultural grounding. The tremendous historic change and the handover can neither revive for the city its totality and integrity, nor return the decolonizing territory to its legitimate temporal track; in fact it is, like the rest of the characters' problematic memories, a misplacement in history which will finally dissolve and scatter into fragments and bring the history of Hong Kong into regression.

**Memory, National Values and Psychology**

Memory plays a crucial role in the postcolonial world as it provides colonized subjects with a link to the past through which they can liberate themselves from present colonial rule and regain or reconstruct their lost national identity. Indeed, the past events selected and the memory

constructed by the colonised subjects are usually of a cultural nature. "People look to this refashioned memory, especially in its collective forms, to give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world" through the search for a "specifically desirable and recoverable past."[100] With the experience of displacement caused by foreign domination, their native culture and national values, which are so distinct from those of their colonizer, become the best markers of their uniqueness and identity. At the same time, they also serve as an invisible bond between the colonized subjects. Hence, in the reconstruction of their collective memory, the colonized nationalists usually try to select and reclaim their suppressed native national values and cultures in order to modify and rewrite them into their national history. Accordingly, this recovered collective national memory is endowed with political meaning which serves to awaken the nationalist sentiments of the colonized subjects and mobilize them to quest for their independence.

However, the quest for an independent postcolonial Hong Kong identity seems undesirable due to the problematic concept of nation and nationalism in the Chinese tradition. John Fitzgerald, in "The Nationaless State: The Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese Nationalism", points out that the "nationalism" of Modern China is very different from the romantic nationalist ideology which prevailed in Europe and Americas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a matter of fact, nationalism barely exists in the country, and the concept of "nation" is so ambivalent that it is to a large extent equivalent to the concept of "state".[101] Instead of

[100] Said, supra note 95. 179

[101] John Fitzgerald, "The Nationaless State: the Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese Nationalism", in *The Australian Journals of Chinese Affairs*, No. 33 (1995), 75-104 (p.

celebrating the singularity of the national self, nationalism in Modern China stresses the integrity of the state. Indoctrinated by the ideology of "the state builds the nation", embedded in Chinese culture, Chinese people lack a desire for the active pursuit of independence and self-determination on a national basis. In the case of the Chinese culture, nationalism virtually takes the form of a consolidation of state power.

Being anxious about the future of Hong Kong, Xu Xi makes use of her novels as the journey in quest of the past and for reconstruction of identity. In both *Chinese Walls* and *Hong Kong Rose*, Xu Xi structures her novels as an anti-chronological, autobiographical narrative of the protagonists Ai Lin and Rose. Through this, Xu Xi has tactfully merged the major, authoritative temporal setting into the background of the narrators' personal time. So, instead of structuring her stories as an on-going movement leading to the future, Xu Xi makes use of an autobiographical narrative style to bring readers into her protagonists' psychological journey into the past. Growing up in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Ai Lin and Rose represent the first Post-WWII middle class generation which was born, brought up and educated under British colonial rule. Unlike their parents, who are *wah kiu* or Mainlanders who migrated to Hong Kong because of wars, Xu Xi and her protagonists are the Hong Kong-born generation who are less burdened than their parents by the obligation of preserving traditional Chinese culture and philosophy: "[They] could speak Cantonese fluently, [they were] really more comfortable in English". They are "westernized and English speaking so that they [can] make a future life abroad in the West" (45). They are pragmatic, and largely assimilated by

---

87)

the colonial culture. Through their education and diligence they have gained success and social status, and at the same time built for themselves as well as their city a pragmatic cosmopolitan identity, financially and economically secure. Therefore, the narrative of the two protagonists' childhood and youth between the late 1960s and early 1970s represents the collective past of Hong Kong people.

Xu Xi presents Hong Kong people's shared sense of the past in various forms in her novels, and one form of it is cultural memory. Memory is an important image in both colonial and postcolonial writings. It symbolizes the spiritual place connection of the colonized to the past and also to their cultural homeland in the alienated cultural and political context of colonial rule:

> Mum commands. "You must always remember you are Chinese no matter where you might live. In Indonesia, when I was small, I could always recite the dynasties from the time I was five. And it had been eight generations, eight, mind you, since my ancestors left Fukien for Java. But as my father always said, our family is pure Chinese blood through and through." (82)

Like Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan and many overseas ethnic Chinese writers, Xu Xi suggests that memory and history are spiritual links that connect the Chinese to their ancestors and origin. Memory plays a very significant role in connecting the whole Chinese race horizontally around the world and vertically from the past to their present. It is through memory of history that they can preserve their essence and root. Memory is the key element of Chineseness which gives the Chinese ethnic group an emotionally-charged identity amidst foreign cultures and in alienated contexts.

However, through her characterization of the restless mothers, who are the upholders of Chinese culture in both novels, Xu Xi seems to hint her disapproval of this way of constructing Hong Kong identity through linkage to a dynastic past. The ghost of Ai Lin's mother recurrently appears in Paul's, Ai Lin's elder brother, and Ai Lin's dream:

> My mother rises up out of the ground like a Chinese ghost – long black hair streaming down her back, her face chalk white, eyes hollow and red. Paul waves a hairbrush at her and begins to brush her hair and suddenly, my mother turns into a beautiful young woman covered in jewels, holding an abacus in her right hand, saying, "find the square root, calculate the cosine." (116)

Ai Lin's dream of her mother represents a repressed memory of the past, mixed up with an imagining and desire for an ideal cultural history in a surreal and haunting manner. The writer of the novels is not satisfied with the idea of building a new identity parasitic on an ancient history which few people have experienced, and a culture which is as unfamiliar as the culture of imperial rule. Indeed, the dynastic history of China has never been the collective memory chosen by Hong Kong people from their own experiences, but a memory that is imposed on them:

> The invention of tradition was a practice very much used by the authorities as an instrument of rule in mass societies when the bond of the small social units like villages and families are dissolving and the authorities need to find other ways of connecting a large number of people to each other. The invention of tradition is a method using collective memory selectively by manipulating certain bits of national past, suppressing others, elevating still others in an

entirely functional way.[102]

Xu Xi sees through the imperial message and the danger behind the acceptance and adoption of this piece of national history: it simply means the transference of Hong Kong from the colonial rule of Britain to that of China. The idea of Romantic nationalism evolves from Romantic ideas which promote the glorification of both individual persons and cultures. Romantic nationalism was at first a cultural movement emphasizing the separateness of cultures and people in respect of the uniqueness and individuality of different groups and cultures. But with the influence of Enlightenment philosophies such as liberalism and rationalism, the desire for unity of ethnic groups sharing a common language, history and homeland turned gradually into a political quest for the constitution of separate political identities for different ethnic groups. As I have said in Chapter One, Romantic nationalism does not exist in the history of China, and Chinese "nationalism" is merely a patriotic feeling practically promoted by the state to consolidate its rule. In the case of Hong Kong, both history and the sense of nationalist sentiments which it facilitates are imposed by the colonial Britain and the PRC pragmatically to achieve their goal. Instead of providing Hong Kong with an independent identity, Chinese cultural memory is a colonization of Hong Kong. Hence, treating this national memory as a basis for the identity quest of decolonizing Hong Kong is not desirable.

Elleke Boehmer, in *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, points out that the "quest tale, often autobiographical, featuring an individual hero who embodies the process of national overcoming," is often used in postcolonial

---

[102] Said. Supra note 95. 179

writings as a vehicle for receiving the integrity of the past, and of national values and identity.[103] It is undeniable that Xu Xi's protagonists are experiencing a quest for identity in their journey back to the past; nevertheless, the "past" for Hong Kong writers may have a different meaning than for other decolonized writers. To them, the recollection of the past never means the recapturing of once-conquered national values; rather, it is an escape from a future. Situating the actual temporal setting of the stories in the mid-1980s, a few years after the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the autobiographical style suggests the shock that the political change causes amongst the population in Hong Kong. Lacking their parents' nostalgic feeling towards their cultural homeland, Ai Lin, Rose and the generation whom they represent are uncertain about the future that the reunion of Hong Kong to the homeland will bring. Instead of accepting and looking forward to the future, a supposedly less problematic political and legitimate ethnic identity provided by China, Xu Xi suggests that Hong Kong people are trapped in between and indecisive about the present and the past, in the view of a self-created pragmatic identity which is social stability and economic prosperity. This tremendous political change indeed brings a great challenge and crisis to their identity. Adoption of an anti-chronological narrative style reflects the fact that Xu Xi and majority of her fellow Hongkongers are hesitant and have little confidence in the unpredictable future. Rather than turning to a new page of history, both Ai Lin and Rose retreat to a pondering of their past. They are struggling for a resolution between their problematic yet accommodating

[103] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 225.

colonial identity and their estranged ethnic identity.

At the same time, Xu Xi's works may also reveal that memory is not necessarily a link through which the marginalized Hong Kong population can seek psychological comfort from their distant mother culture. In *Chinese Walls*, Ai Lin is actually entrapped in her childhood memory, and especially that of her incestuous relationship with her brother, Philip. Incest, just like the submission of Hong Kong to the power of colonial Britain, is a forbidden relationship and a shameful past. It is "a terrible word, a terrible thing" that is totally unspeakable. Even though Ai Lin tries to reveal her experience to her psychiatrist, no one, unfortunately, can be connected to her painful experience and understand her: "[s]he [the therapist] shares memories only for analysis and revelation of inner neuroses; life, however, goes on without her" (119). As a result, Ai Lin's unspeakable past and Hong Kong's problematic historical heritage turn them into the subject of people's condemnation. The painful memory therefore becomes a secret that they cannot share with others. It further isolates them from the majority. In fact, Ai Lin excludes people from her life and refuses intimacy in fear of the awakening and revelation of this peculiar memory. It eventually disconnects her from life, which entails progression to a future. Like most of her fellow ethnic writers, Xu Xi uses the metaphor of madness to represent the crisis brought to her protagonist and the Hong Kong people whom she represents by a memory that no one can share. Rather than being a link to the cultural homeland which provides a psychologically confirming identity, the problematic history of Hong Kong disconnects and marginalizes its people and threatens the integrity of the city.

Being the victim of incest is not a sin, but indulgence in this disapproved relationship is, in the normative view. Xu Xi's *Chinese Walls* may suggest that Ai Lin's isolation is not solely due to people's inability to share her experience; it is also because of the fact that they cannot understand her attachment to this memory. We find that Ai Lin's attachment to the memory of her incestuous relationship with Philip resembles another type of nostalgic feeling amongst Hong Kong people:

> My therapist keeps telling me it's normal to feel anger, because I was the "victim" of incest. She doesn't understand though. Every time I try to feel this anger she tells me about, so that I can "work through it and forgive myself, if not forget," I hear Philip's sing-song Chinglish-English voice saying, "I can your girlfriend be." And then I laugh, because it makes me remember, and the truth is, I don't ever want to forget about Philip and me (54).

Indeed, the protagonist can never openly admit her addiction to this taboo experience, her desire is repressed. Not only does her addiction to this taboo hint at the secrecy of the Hong Kong nostalgic feeling towards colonial rule, but the incestuous relationship is also an undertone subtly suggesting the yearning for an independent and self-sufficient power relationship and ruling structure in Hong Kong. Indeed, through the forbidden relationship of Philip and Ai Lin, which is a self-fulfilling and self-sufficient relationship free from the intimidation of external power, Xu Xi may be suggesting Hong Kong's subtle desire for independence and self-rule which is politically incorrect and repressed like the sin of incest. Hence, she can only recapture this self-fulfilling experience through subconscious dreaming and conscious memory. In Ai Lin's narrative, readers can notice that the character presents her story in a stream of

consciousness. Ai Lin's narrative hardly distinguishes between present and past. She willingly relives and confines herself to the past. She rejects new relationships as a future suggests the possibility of an end to her memory about Philip. Likewise, Hong Kong people develop a nostalgic feeling towards their colonized history and identity which they try to hide because of its political incorrectness. In facing the issue of 1997, they hesitate to envisage the possibility of a new identity and retreat to the nostalgic memory of the colonial British rule.

Xu Xi makes use of the image of mental disorder to present the complicated relationship of Hong Kong with its history. Madness, indeed, is an image often used by postcolonial and ethnic minority writers. It violently symbolizes ethnicity and ethnic culture as endangered by the assimilating power of the dominating, colonial mainstream. Both Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, in *Woman Warrior* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, associate madness with the isolation and miscommunication of the traditional ethnic Chinese culture confronting the estrangement of foreign cultures. But Xu Xi modifies this public symbol in her novel. Madness no doubt represents the isolation of Ai Lin, given that she possesses a secretive history that nobody can share and understand. Yet her madness is more largely related to the disorder of time than the tension of cultures. Ai Lin experiences mental breakdown as she fails to get rid of the haunting past. Her failure to distinguish the present from the past results in her living in the past; in her imagination and in retreat from reality. This is unlike the importance of memories to the ethnicity of decolonizing subjects where it is "a feeling of continuity with the past, a feeling that is maintained as an essential part of one's self-definition"(De Vos 1975:17).

providing "reservoirs for renewing humane values [....] Ethnic memory is thus future, not past, oriented" (Fischer 1986: 176). To people in this situation, memories rebuild their long repressed ethnic identity under colonial rule. The recalling of their ethnic memories involves, at the same time, the recovering of their integrity and independence. Ironically, Xu Xi presents through Ai Lin the perception that memories can be entrapping and in a spiral movement. This sadly reveals the difference in the situation of the decolonization of Hong Kong, compared with that of other ex-colonized territories. There is no hope for Ai Lin to recover from her madness nor for Hong Kong its integrity since the future of handover means departing from colonial British historical memory to the still more remote Imperial Chinese historical memory. With this image, Xu Xi seems to point to the hopelessness of the future as well as the independence of Hong Kong. Recovering distant ethnic memory does not link Hong Kong to its future; ironically Ai Lin's memory seems to link the future to the past.

With the gap of three years in publication, Xu Xi rationalizes Hong Kong people's nostalgia in *Hong Kong Rose*, her second novel. She also represents differently the city's relationship with its colonial government. In the novel, the protagonist's memory is oriented to the 1970s and 80s. It is a golden period for both Rose and Hong Kong. This period represents both the superficial honeymoon of Rose with Paul and of Hong Kong with the colonial British government, during which Rose's career and the Hong Kong economy prosper. Experiencing the economic recession in the mid 1990s and standing right at the crossroad in 1997, the novelist adopts a more objective and detached perspective in portraying Hongkongers'

reservations about the future and their relationship with the colonial government. Instead of being nostalgic and obsessive about the memory of the problematic union with the colonial power, Rose is created as the collective memory of Hong Kong's speedy development, prosperity and success in the 1970s-80s. At the same time, Hong Kong's relationship with the colonial government is no longer the incestuous protection from the handsome big brother, but a mutually-beneficial if superficial social marriage with a homosexual husband. Truly, the peculiar union with Paul and colonial Britain enlightens Rose and Hong Kong. It raises her social status and broadens her horizons. It is through Paul's society that Rose is finally connected to the Western world. Rose, when facing the uncertain outcome of the possible charge from the FBI in the United States, her temporary place of asylum from her problematic marriage, recalls and re-evaluates her problematic relationship with her lawyer Eurasian husband Paul, and her own early career development in Hong Kong. It is undeniable that the homosexual husband, who is the embodiment of what is abnormal in British colonial rule over Hong Kong, gives Rose, the young generation of Hong Kong, a painful, perplexing and embarrassing identity; but it is also through this experience that the protagonist forms her unique personality. Narrative in this novel changes from Ai Lin's stream of consciousness to Rose's self-evaluating diary. The protagonist handles her memory in a more controlled manner. The remembrance of the hardship, struggle and success is a process of self-identification for Rose. Xu Xi, with the approach of the handover of Hong Kong, becomes more pragmatic and less attached to colonial identity. Memory is not a refusal of change as it once was. It is a source of courage and reassurance concerning

Hong Kong's ability to deal with hardship in the future. Instead of seeking attachment to the estranged history of China, Rose and her fellow Hongkongers seek comfort from their colonial memory, of the time when their existential identity and success were formed, since they feel that their diligently constructed identity is being threatened, and are insecure about their future.

On the one hand, Xu Xi seems to have adopted a more rational and detached definition of Hong Kong's relationship with its colonial past with the approaching of the actual handover of sovereignty; on the other hand, she becomes even more pessimistic about the future in her second novel. *Chinese Walls* presents Hong Kong people's mixed feelings about the process of decolonization. "There is no fear, I realized, in memory." (136) This comment of Ai Lin gives a conclusion and resolution to the crisis of change that Hong Kong people have been facing. From 1992 onwards, the two years prior to the publication of *Chinese Walls*, Hong Kong underwent a series of reforms under the governorship of Chris Patten. Sociologists comment that the reforms were merely the British government's efforts to improve its image in history. It interestingly parallels Ai Lin's consultation of a psychotherapist. The rethinking of history becomes a crucial step preparing Ai Lin and the Hong Kong people for a happy reunion with their homeland. With the protagonist's returning home, her reunion with family and her coming to terms with memory, the novel seems to present a hopeful future for Hong Kong. Neither the memory of ancient dynasties nor the problematic colonial relationship is a nightmare; Xu Xi resolves the problem of cultural and national conflicts by turning Hong Kong from a national region to an international city:

> I don't know how to feel about this new chic. I don't feel so different here anymore now. Chinese faces speak to me in English and Mandarin as well as in Cantonese, and I routinely hear Singaporean or Malay accents which sound a lot like Indonesian. I see faces that make me think of a whole nation of Chinese, not just Cantonese Chinese. American expatriates, unlike their English counterparts of yore, do try to babble in fluent Mandarin and even surprisingly fluent Cantonese without being police officers. And everyone has been everywhere, or so they would have you believe, and return to Hong Kong because, well because this is where they belong (137).

In fact, she compares Peter Pan, who "has no nationality", with Hong Kong so as to envisage a global identity which overcomes the tension of the cultural and national identity caused by the political changes.

Although it seems to the readers that the novelist, with the creation of an independent and rational Rose in her second novel, is rationalizing her complex relationship with the colonial power and accepting the reality of the political change, the blurred vision of the disappearance of Lady Liberty when future and present merge at the end of *Hong Kong Rose* seems to reveal that the writer is actually less hopeful about the future. The political reforms from 1992 had damaged Sino-British relations. Chris Patten's series of reforms provided Hong Kong people with the experience of liberty and exercise of self-governing power which is similar to Rose's exposure to freedom and self-sufficiency without Paul during her life in the United States. This temporary taste of freedom, however, widens the gaps between Rose and Paul as well as Hong Kong and its future homeland, and makes the return a going backward. What Hong Kong is confronting, in the perception of Xu Xi's works, is not really the colonial power and its endangering of cultural identity; the power of the history that it is returning

to is presented as an even more intimidating force. Decolonization here puts the territory into a doubly-marginalized situation. In fact, this may suggest that with the approaching of the actual political moment, Hong Kong people were getting more disillusioned about political gestures and disguises. They were coming closer to the perception that however changes were to be made, the identity of Hong Kong would remain problematic and undefined.

### III. Estrangement of Home

As we have seen, Xu Xi examines nostalgia in Hong Kong through her representation of time; but perplexed feelings towards past and present, and tensions between history and memory also emerge in her perception of the city's spaces. Landscape plays an important role in projecting the transformation of the ex-colony, and also becomes a means of studying the formation of the city's cultural identity. Space, or more specifically landscape and architecture, are a form of non-verbal history. The places and architecture depicted in the novels are carefully chosen by Xu Xi to embody Chinese history, reflecting colonial experience as well as the modern, cosmopolitan present of Hong Kong. At the same time, in closely examining the idea of home, the writer gives spatiality a psychological and cultural profile. Romantic philosophy treats home and homeland as places that possess special historical associations. Their uniqueness separates one cultural group from another. In her detailed portrayal of the protagonists' home and their homeland Hong Kong, Xu Xi attempts to investigate the cultural identities which various colonial and decolonizing experiences have brought to the city. Her aim is to identify the mixture of cultures, a

unique historical formation that can give a binding identity to all Hongkongers.

In postcolonial writing, reference to geography is significant as it reflects the relationship of the colonizer and the colonized to the colony; in so doing it reveals the complicated reality of the home ground for the colonized, both physically and psychologically. Akhil Grupta and James Ferguson in 'Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference' locate and explain the unbreakable link between space and the colonized:

> Colonialism...represents the displacement of one form of interconnection by another. This is not to deny that colonialism or an expanding capitalism, does indeed have profoundly dislocating effects on existing societies. But by always foregrounding the spatial distribution of hierarchical power relations, we can better understand the process whereby a space achieves a distinctive *identity* as a place. Keeping in mind that notions of locality or community refer both to a demarcated physical space *and* to clusters of interaction, we can see that the identity of place emerges by the intersection of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically organized spaces with its cultural construction as a community or locality.[104]

Akhil and Ferguson believe that, even though the colonial experience does not necessarily affect or bring any changes to the physical landscape of the colony, the process of foreign invasion and occupation problematizes the spatial identity of the colony, and thus dislocates the colonized subjects' perception of territory, their psychological space. David Punter, in his book

[104] Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, 'Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1992); p. 9.

*Postcolonial Imaginings: fictions of a new world order* states that: "Home ground [becomes] foreign territory. And the effect of this impossible conjunction, this inconceivable distortion of boundaries and the sense of place is to construct the threat, to prevent, therefore, the possibility of language, to erode meaning."[105] Reference to place can reveal the perplexed identity of the colonized territory. Representation of physical space gives the reader a sense of the colony's appearance and location; the naming of various places in postcolonial novels can, moreover, be a representation of psychological space, revealing attitudes towards the colonized territory. To colonized subjects the colony is both a piece of land and their home, where they reside physically and are attached psychologically. Nevertheless, to Hongkongers and many colonized people, this place is both familiar and estranged. The concept of "home" is problematic in postcolonial theory, and this is especially so in the case of decolonizing Hong Kong, since it is exposed to both Chinese and Western cultures, for which the concept of "home" has different profiles. "Home", in both China and the West, usually refers to the house where one lives with one's family. "Home" is thus primarily a spatially-oriented word. As a result, people tend to overlook the psychological aspect of the notion of "home".

Radhika Mohanram, in her book *Black Body: Women, Colonialism and Space*, introduces Benedict Anderson's and Liisa Malkki's ideas into her discussion of the importance of homeland in stabilizing one's spatial identity:

---

[105] David Punter, *Postcolonial Imaginings: fictions of a new world order*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, c2000.

> He [Anderson] also points to our use of the language of kinship—'Motherland', 'Fatherland', *patria*—and the importance of this in the definition of our cultural identity. The use of kinship terms, he suggests, indicates bondedness through blood which establishes or structures our relationship to our country or place of origin. The terms we use for home—'homeland', *heimat*—also act to territorialize our identity, denoting 'something to which one is naturally tied'.[106]

The observation demonstrates the essence of the whole idea and clearly explains the reason why the geographical space of the postcolonial is internalized and becomes a psychological landscape that forms the spatial identity of the colonized subjects. "Home" in diasporic writings, and to those migrants, travelers, exiles and refugees, goes beyond its physical space. It is an emotionally charged word. The notion becomes internalized and attention is drawn to the psychological space it occupies in a person. Home can be a sense of belongings to one's origin. This is especially true in Chinese culture. To Chinese people, home is the physical home ground where one lives, and also an invisible, imaginary space that connects one to their parents. Home in Chinese is synonymous with family while the notion of Chinese family has a very broad and inclusive nature which horizontally connects the individual to people of the same race and vertically links him/her to the generations of ancestors. This psychological complicity in the Chinese notion of home is best exemplified by overseas Chinese *wah kiu*. To Ai Lin's mother, home is the physical space of Far East Mansion where she stays with her husband and her children, but it is also the distant psychological space of Tjilatjap where she spent her childhood with her

---

[106] See Radhika Mohanram, *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and* Space. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, c1999. p. 97; and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Verso, London, p. 143.

parents and her brothers; and at the same time, regardless of her alienation from Chinese culture and inability to speak good Chinese, home also refers to her imaginary ancestral homeland of China which her ancestors left eight generations before. As a *wah kiu* herself, Xu Xi makes the observation that

> true to the tradition of *wah kiu* everywhere, they will insist they *are* Chinese. I know that cry only too well. It provides a security blanket of denial and comfort in the face of a reality that is changing too rapidly to assimilate or even to fully understand.[107]

So, no matter where they go, their Chinese ancestral homeland always lives vividly in their mind. And as a matter of fact all the *wah kiu* wanderers, the Chinese emigrants, always bring along with them their "rice cooker",[108] their Chinese traditions and culture, transferring and transmitting it to the new place where they try to build a new home that resembles "home".

This tension between the Chinese and Western notions of home is especially emphasized by Xu Xi. Though Hong Kong has undergone 99 years of assimilation by British culture, various historical events such as the Japanese Occupation, the June-Fourth Incident, and experience of the impending the 1997 Handover have given people a strong sense of identification with the place; the imposed British culture cannot always be reconciled with this. In *Hong Kong Rose* and *Chinese Walls*, Xu Xi makes considerable reference to landmarks and colonial architecture in Hong Kong. In "Invention, Memory, and Place", Said comments that geography is a reflection

---

[107] Xu Xi, "Wah Kiu Wanderers" in *Asia Magazine*, March 24-26, 1995: Volume 33, K-12, p.30

[108] Ibid. In the article Xu Xi makes the observation that some Hong Kong executives she met in US "have even insisted on bringing their rice cookers, because the foreign food was so unpalatable."

> [...] on the mapping, conquest, and annexation of territory both in what Conrad called the dark places of the earth and in its most densely inhabited and lived-in places, like India or Palestine.... In the modern ear Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is the essential parable of how geography and conquest go together, providing an almost eerie prefiguration of historical figures like Clive and Hastings in India, or scientific adventurers and explorers like Murchison in African decades and decades later. These experiences enable complicated memories for natives and (in the India case) Britishers alike; a similar dialectic of memory over territory animates the relationship of French and Algerian accounts of the 130 years of French rule in North Africa. We should never have left or given up India or Algeria, say some, using strange atavistic sentiments like the Raj revival—a spate of TV shows and films like *The Jewel in the Crown*, *A Passage to India*, *Gandhi*, and the fashion of wearing safari suits, helmets, desert boots—as a way of periodically provoking nostalgia for the good old days of British supremacy in Asia and Africa, whereas most Indians and Algerians would likely say that their liberation came as a result of being able after years of nationalist struggle to take hold of their own affairs, reestablish their identity, culture, and language, and above all, reappropriate their territory from the colonial masters. Hence, to some extent, we witness the remarkable emergence of Anglo-Indian literature by Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and many others, reexcavating and re-charting the past from a postcolonial point of view, thereby erecting a new postimperial space.[109]

The occupation of the colonizer in the territory is not only limited to physical space, but also includes cultural invasion of the institutions, livelihood and even psychology of the people. Xu Xi's works suggest that

---

[109] Edward Said, "Invention, Memory, and Place" in *Critical Inquiry 26*, Winter 2000, pp. 175-92, (81-2).

the feeling of estrangement for Hong Kong people results more from alteration of psychological space than from changes in physical space. In her analysis the colonized people feel estranged from their home primarily because of the establishment of colonial institutions. Paul Lie Senior in *Hong Kong Rose*, offers a view of what a home should be: "A home,' he said, "has to reflect both of you [Rose and Paul]. Otherwise you won't want to be in it together" (*Hong Kong Rose*, p.108). So, Hong Kong, as the home of over seven million Hongkongers, should be a place uniquely reflecting and representing the identity and characteristics of its people instead of a replica of the homelands which they have left. Ironically, however, Xu Xi describes Rose's home as chaotic. And its chaos is exactly the reflection of the people living in it – the complicated family background of Rose and the historical and cultural background of Hong Kong and its people:

> I thought about my parents' chaotic flat, with its mixture of Indonesian, Chinese and European décor, all jumbled together some piece always threatening to topple over. There was an incongruity about a Chinese goldfish painting hanging above the dark wooden native Indonesian statues of a half naked couple next to an ornate Italian ceramic floral arrangement on top of a Korean sideboard. And that was only one tiny corner of the living room." (108)

The disorganization of Rose's parents' flat reveals the core reason for the lack of a sense of home of the colonized city. Recent historical experience has exposed the city to the influence of different cultures. The majority of the Hong Kong populace are Chinese emigrants who brought with them their Chinese values and traditions when they first moved to the city, while the British colonial government imposed British culture on Hong Kong

through the establishment of various institutions. Nevertheless, just like the flat of the Khos, the city is accommodating but unable to integrate this variety of cultural experiences into its own unique synthesis and, as a result, presents a chaotic, dislocated and even dismantled image to the outside world.

But instead of trying to emphasize and exaggerate the Chineseness and Oriental quality in the landscape, in such a way as to preserve a politically correct Chinese cultural identity for the decolonizing city, Xu Xi represents social reality in presenting the totally different picture of Hong Kong from a colonial angle. Indeed, after ninety-nine years of colonial government and British institutional establishment, the originally Chinese landscape of the insignificant fishing island has inevitably changed and taken on colonial colouring. Xu Xi insists on revealing colonial implanting and assimilation in the colony. The writer gives plenty of detailed descriptions of places like Tsimshatsui, which is full of hotels, discos, "nightclubs and girlie bars". In fact, all these landscapes are reminders of the colonial rule in Hong Kong. Geographer Judith T. Kenny in her article "Climate, Race and Imperial Authority: the symbolic landscape of British Hill Station in India" borrows Edward Said's idea in this explanation of colonial geographies:

> These colonial geographies "help the mind intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close and what is far away". Far from being innocent distortions of other cultures, those representations imply power relations. "Taxonomic lores" developed as part of these geographies serve to separate races, regions and nations according to categories of difference.

> Although Said's work on *Orientalism* is perhaps the best-known analysis of imperial practices and discourses of the Other – an analysis which shows how "European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively" (1979:3) – others have extended his argument (e.g., Inden 1990).[110]

The writer shows the colony as presenting a miniature of Western cosmopolitan, prosperous city life. These Western geographies found in the "Pearl of Orient" reveal the power and influence of the colonizer on the colony. The colonizing process has taken place slowly and gradually, yet thoroughly. Xu Xi's depictions of places such as *La Salle*, the missionary school that Paul studied in, the churches, and the Peninsula Hotel, reflect the fact that the territory is being colonized culturally through different cultural, religious, political, educational and even social institutions. It penetrates into all aspects of the society and life of its people. The complication of the idea of home for the colonized people is largely due to the change of the place's psychological meaning, reflected in local changes to the physical appearance of the landscape. The colonizing process has never been merely territorial and geographical conquest, but has been a process of cultural and political assimilation.

Xu Xi's landscape is also like a time capsule which records all the historical experiences of the city. Xu Xi tries to exemplify the unique form of nostalgia in Hong Kong by illustrating how time affects the meaning of a place. Obviously, the colonial geographies depicted by Xu Xi in the

[110] Judith T. Kenny, "Climate, Race and Imperial Authority: the symbolic landscape of British Hill Station in India" in *Annals of Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (Dec., 1995).

novels carry a symbolic meaning, affecting her presentation of colonial geographies. One of the most vivid landscape images is that of Chung King Mansion and Tsimshatsui in *Chinese Walls*. From the description of Tsimshatsui, the area in which Ai Lin's home is situated, readers gain a glimpse of the traces left by history on the territory:

> I like Tsimshatsui and our flat which has two floors and an interior connecting staircase. From our verandah on the seventeenth floor, I can watch the Kowloon-Canton railway trains pull into the station, and the grey U.S. battleships dock in the harbor. The sweep of the island's hills are like a picture frame for the buildings dotting the hillside and the waterfront. At night, the neon lights go on. My favorite is the one on top of the low building in the middle – three red Japanese characters which Dad says is an advertisement for monosodium glutamate. It isn't lonely in Tsimshatsui, or quiet and scary. (*Chinese Walls*, p.5)

The place is a miniature of the seeming prosperity and multicultural reality of Hong Kong. The Kowloon-Canton railway represents the colonial situation. Yet, it is also a symbol of Hong Kong's connection to China, its past and future. Boundary Street where the railway lies reveals the significance of Hong Kong and its colonial experience. It is the embodiment of the Sino-British relationship which has affected the past and present and will definitely influence the future of Hong Kong. The landscape of Kowloon peninsula, the New Territories adjacent to Mainland China and connected by the Kowloon-Canton railway also reveals the writer's view of the inseparability of Hong Kong from China. The U.S. battleships, brought by the Vietnamese War, link this small port in the Far East to the world power, whereas the Japanese advertisement remains there

as a witness to Japanese Occupation and influence.

Xu Xi's presentation of Hong Kong is not limited solely to the domestic landscape, but extends to descriptions of the city's seascape and skyline. In perceived relation to these are features of the transportation infrastructure like the Kai Tak Airport, the Ocean Terminal, traffic networks and runways. While the domestic geography and institutional establishments represent the tension and relationship between the colonial and local cultures within the society, these landscapes and structures provide an outward looking perspective, and present the image of an international city connecting itself to the outside world. These landscapes reveal the prosperity and modernization of the colonial city, and at the same time the historical changes that the colony is confronting. The airport is adopted as a major motif in *Hong Kong Rose*. Kai Tak International Airport is a terminus and place of departure for planes, and for travelers like Rose, while Hong Kong is a place of convergence for several forces and powers. On one hand the changing landscape is a reminder of history and of what the colony has experienced: "There'll be too many flights to keep up this night time curfew. War brought changes, you know, but peace created a whole new world" (85). But on the other hand it symbolizes the fact that Hong Kong itself is standing at a crossroad of history: "We faced the night sky together. In the distance, the lights of the runway flickered into blackness" (86). Hong Kong is not only a colony of Britain: like Kai Tak International Airport, small and odd in architectural design though it seems, the colonial experience links this small city to the international world. Like Rose and all the flights at the airport, Hong Kong, facing the transition of 1997, is waiting for take-off and for arrival at a new history.

But forming part of this auspicious scene is the Chung King Mansion, a simulation of the awkwardness of Hong Kong at the cross-roads of historical change. This mysterious building haunts the imagination of the young Ai Lin like a dream. It becomes a symbolic landmark representing multicultural interaction as a result of colonial rule:

> I go past Chung King Mansion's dingy, cavernous mouths. Two American sailors are going into the building. Their white uniforms gleam like the teeth on the toothpaste commercial on TV. Aren't they afraid of getting their uniforms dirty in there?
>
> [...]As I near Chung King Mansion, I slow down. Coming down the steps of that building is the strangest looking person. She has orange hair, and wears a short *cheongsam* with a stiff high collar and very high heels. There's something unreal about her, like she's a doll that's come to life.... (*Chinese Walls*, p. 5)

Chung King Mansion, like Tsimshatsui, represents the colonial and hybrid lifestyle of Hong Kong. However, Xu Xi heightens her description of the place, and the orange haired prostitute becomes a symbol of the problematic history of the territory, pointing to the corruption and degradation which goes with the superficial colonial prosperity. Hong Kong, symbolized by the orange haired prostitute, is entrapped in an embarrassment imposed by history. She wears a "short *cheongsam* with a stiff high collar"(5) to emphasize her Chinese cultural origin and oriental virtues and beauty in order to impress her western clients. Nevertheless, she is betrayed by her orange hair. Her vanity and desire to be assimilated to a western culture are revealed. As a result, she is "the strangest looking person", representing the mixed history which haunts both Ai Lin and Hongkongers.

Inability to resolve the significance of space as well as the meaning of incestuous love haunts Ai Lin's mind subconsciously and drives her to the edge of insanity. It is not until the end of the novelette, when she returns to her home in Hong Kong after over twenty years, that she is able to come to terms with her fear. She can finally understand and face the traumatic experiences of her childhood. She is able to see and admit the reality and the "ugliness" of her home behind the vanity and self-deception:

> When we walk into the lobby of Far East Mansion, I am struck by how much like home it feels. The tallest building in all Kowloon, right in front of the harbor – how proud my father had been of this building, of its grandeur, its façade swelling out on the lower floors like a pregnant woman. I am glad he is not alive to see the extent of the waterfront's encroachment of the harbor at Tsimshatsui East, and the usurping of his building's place of importance....
>
> "It was a surprise, this building," Don says as we wait for the lift. "Ugly architecturally, and the kind of location you'd expect some developer to snap up and turn into a more profitable enterprise. Hard to believe it was once residential."
>
> "Never really was. My dad would be the last to admit it, but there were home factories and offices and even a brothel on the fourteenth floor when I was a kid." (*Chinese Walls*, pp.125-6)

She is relieved of her childhood fear as she manages to see the repressed truth and ugliness of the place instead of the grandeur and superiority of the building impressed on her by her father. Ai Lin is at last able to admit and accept the "shame" of the impurity of the building with its mixture of "home factories", "offices" and even a "brothel" together with residential

apartments. What she sees is not only the ugly reality of Far East Mansion, but at the same time something which reflects the reality of rapidly growing Hong Kong. It reveals the density of the city, the diligence of the people in defining a working space regardless of the environment; and their toughness, flexibility and adaptability in coping with the growth and the needs of society. Chung King Mansion has been the creation of Ai Lin's unconscious and her repressed fear. It is a symbolic place onto which she projects all the hatred, shame and disgust which she feels about her home, Hong Kong, Tsimshatsui and Far East Mansion. It is only when she has understood herself, accepting the imperfection of her place, that she is capable of appreciating the value of her city, and developing a sense of attachment to it as a home.

Apart from this, the colonial landscape seems to be described in such a way as to reveal the colonial subjects' attachment to the period when the territory was under British rule. Churches and schools are an obvious representation of culture and ideology. Xu Xi has tactfully chosen these cultural markers to demonstrate the institutionalization of colonial power in the colony. These colonial establishments take up physical space in the territory and also dominate the psychological space, becoming deeply rooted in the mentality of Hongkongers. Hence, the colonial landscape and all the European colonialist institutional establishments in the territory continue to mark the landscape and the memory of the colonized subjects. They are the best revelation and evidence of the territory's history and experience. So, instead of showing two contradictory pictures of nostalgia towards the remote Chinese ancestral history and entanglement with the colonial past, Xu Xi actually defines the cross roads at which Hong Kong

people stand during the decolonization of their home city. Past and history, just like the landscape and architectures in the city, lack uniformity. The people face and confront a problematic past, finding difficulties in choosing between colonial and pre-colonial history.

## IV. (Un)writing the Empire

As was discussed in Chapter Two, the medium of writing has created perplexity in postcolonial Hong Kong writings. It has aroused much controversy especially in relation to Anglophone Hong Kong literary works such as Xu Xi's. Due to the special political events that Hong Kong has experienced, people are very conscious of the role that language, the major expression of culture and marker of identity, plays in the decolonization of the city. In the course of decolonization, language has transformed into a postcolonial discourse, a political assertion closely related to the new identity of the ex-colony. As a result, languages have gone beyond their functional uses and become symbolic representations of differing identities. For this reason, the tension between languages has become intensified. English, in the context of Hong Kong, is not merely an international language or a business language. It is a colonial language which reminds the city of its history of being colonized. It is the embodiment of the imperial regime and its rule. At the same time, English is the medium of law and education. Hence, to the native people of Hong Kong, English language is more powerful and destructive than any military weapon which the imperial power possesses. Language symbolizes a level of colonization beyond the territorial and political. It colonises the mentality of people in the colony through its political and educational institutionalisation.

Critics and even ordinary readers are often suspicious of Xu Xi's use of English as the medium of writing in her novels. In the Introduction of *(Un)writing Empire*, Theo D'Haen usefully classifies types, intentions and functions of writing in postcolonial literary works. He cites the examples of many postcolonial theorists, including Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak and suggests that "these scholars, by laying the genealogy of 'writing' empire, are by the same token themselves in a sense '*un*-writing' empire."[111] In other words, these writers deconstruct the empire by writing about it, and undoing the colonial influence and imperial literary colonization by re-writing and re-visiting colonialism and the colonial history. He further compares the ways which Asian literary works from India, Malaysia and Indonesia function in "unwriting the empire". While Indian writers such as Shobha Dé re-examine elite Westernized intellectuals to show that they form "part of a new hybrid culture which is happy to select and ignore at random from Western supermarket of ideas, styles and modes" and that in this new "independent consumerist society", the West and its presence, is chosen as "merely a source of goodies",[112] Malaysian scholars like Muhammad Haji Salleh suggest that literature should appeal to indigenous and particularly oral, literary forms in order to counter the West's cultural hegemony.[113] So, directing the question back to Xu Xi's novels, is the writer consciously un-writing the empire while she is writing about the empire? Is she writing an English novel as well as a novel in English? Language is associated with

[111] Theo D'Haen, *(Un)writing Empire*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), p.8.
[112] Rachel Dwyer, *Filming the Gods: religion and Indian cinema*, (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[113] Muhammad Haji Salleh, "Unwriting with the Voice: Orality as a Post-Colonial Literary Apparatus in Malaysian Literature".

conscious deliberation and also the pressure of unconscious forces. This section is going to examine the profile of language in her work in order to get a glimpse of the process of the formation of her identity as well as that of postcolonial Hong Kong.

### i) Writing the Imaginary Empire

Before we can analyze the interrelationship between language and the unconscious as well as the whole identity development of Xu Xi and her works, we have to first deal with how and how far Xu Xi is able to un-write the empire by writing about the empire. *Chinese Walls*, the first novel of Xu Xi was published together with *Daughters of Hui*, a short story collection, in 1994. With the power struggle and diplomatic disputes over the future of Hong Kong between the British and PRC governments in the real world as the background, this story about Hong Kong's success, fear of communist China and the problem of emigration, quickly attracted the attention of a Western readership. With all the anticipation and speculation, Xu Xi's second book, *Hong Kong Rose*, published in 1997, the year that carried a significant meaning to Hong Kong and its people, had an obvious appeal to its readers. It was the year in which the law gave a new political definition of the identity of the city and its people. At the same time, it was also the key political event of the year, the handover, that gave rise to all the problems and turmoil. Law has played a crucial role in the transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong from Britain to China (the legal system was central to the colonial rule of the British government in Hong Kong), so, it is not a mere coincidence that the author of the book picks a lawyer as the occupation of the male protagonist, Paul Lie. Although the author's

depiction of Paul as a solicitor is rather a superficial one which lacks an in-depth description of actual occupational practice, the characterization of Paul is an important symbol of the perplexity of Hong Kong identity. Foregrounding such as the legal profession, together with Paul's background and personality, builds up a powerful image of the changes, crisis and struggle that Hong Kong has been going through – socially, culturally, politically and legally. In focusing on the legal profession, Xu Xi reveals what is central to the elitist, Westernized side of the colonized society, since law was Hong Kong's best established colonial system under the imperial regime.

Xu Xi's writing, however, encourages a misperception of the linguistic setting and cultural environment of this former British colony. Showing her usual optimism, she misleads her readers by generalizing the setting, stereotyping her characterization and romanticizing the social situation of Hong Kong. Indeed, all Xu Xi's characters, no matter whether it is the middle class Rose Kho and Ai Lin, the elitist Lies, Man Yee, the actor from the grassroots, or the more conservative and traditional parent generation who formerly lived in China and other parts of Southeast Asia, are all westernized, multi-lingual and most importantly, shown as speaking good English. Definitely in this aspect, her works do not accurately reveal the social reality of Hong Kong and, thus, can probably only give a partial depiction of the linguistic identity of this ex-colony. As well as the eccentric decolonization of Hong Kong, the profile of the colonial language and the linguistic identity of the ex-colony is unique in a way that makes it stands out from its fellow British ex-colonies like the United States, India, and even Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia and Singapore where the

influence of Chinese cultures and traditions is strong. The *Official Language Ordinance*[114] certainly reveals the society's emphasis on English, and the secondary role given to Chinese; but at the same time, it presents a partial picture of the public sector. The significance of the English language in government and in business makes the language a key to success. It plays a crucial role in education, the professions and leadership. But as has been said in Chapter One, English in Hong Kong is limited as a functional language. It fails to get out of the classroom and offices. It remains a classroom and professional discourse. It is merely a language of limited use, confined within certain contexts, a social equalizer for the less privileged and the symbol of elite status. And it has never become a lingua franca as in Malaysia and India.

In fact, unlike the façade presented by Xu Xi, English is not a popular language commonly used within the ethnic Chinese community of Hong Kong. At the same time, contrary to the bilingualism that the law tries to enhance in the public sphere, English is an estranged colonial language while Cantonese is the only common dialect widely used by the community. In other words, as the majority of the middle class and even the elites of Hong Kong are ethnic Chinese, they rarely communicate in English except in school and at work. Even though English is the medium of instruction in school, only elitist missionary schools can afford to have native English speakers as teachers, whereas local public schools are actually using Cantonese or Chinglish as a medium for the teaching of

---

[114] *The Official Language Ordinance (Cap.5)* was passed in 1974. It made both English and Chinese the official languages of Hong Kong. Before that, English was the only official language even though Hong Kong is basically an ethnic Chinese community and over 98% of the local people use Chinese instead of English.

English textbooks. Subjects like English Literature, French and German, which are considered as subjects of strong colonial colour, are taught only in a few elitist convent schools. Hence, only the wealthy elite have the chance to be exposed to authentic English language and culture, and to be "Westernized", while ordinary Hongkongers do not speak or write fluent English. To the poor, without even a chance to receive higher education, English and even the colonial government are simply foreign and alien.[115] What Xu Xi presents seems to be a generalized picture of the situation of most of the British ex-colonies like Malaysia and India, but it is not an accurate reflection of Hong Kong. It may be due to her Chinese-Indonesian background as well as American influence that her female protagonists have a strong resemblance to the American-born-Chinese characters in the works of Chinese-American writers like Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston. Rose and Ai Lin are assimilated and cut off from their Chinese culture even though they are brought up and intermittently resident in an ethnic Chinese community. One should not treat Xu Xi's account of language as being purely fallacious; on the contrary, this inaccuracy can be analyzed as revealing of the complicated formation of the writer's linguistic self.

On the face of it, Xu Xi's vision of the empire can be claimed as a very conservative and even a colonial one; it is to a great extent the job of the reader to discern the postcolonial subtext. The gap between reality and the fictitious world in Xu Xi's works gives plenty of room for imagination

[115] The government of Hong Kong does provide 9 years of compulsory free education to all children of Hong Kong residents aged between 6 and 15. However, most of the public neighbourhood schools are Chinese schools; all subjects, except English, are taught in Chinese. The English standard of the students from these schools is not very high.

and flexibility for interpretation to readers. While Xu Xi is writing her optimized "empire", the readers are left with the freedom to examine the image of the empire concealed in Xu Xi's work. I am only focusing on the examination of Xu Xi's "empire" in this part and will leave discussion of readers' contribution to the postcolonial reading and deconstruction of the empire to the next section. One might conclude that these inaccuracies stem from Xu Xi's cross-cultural and transnational experiences. Her frequent absence from Hong Kong as well as the prolonged stay and career in America and her Indonesian heritage may have confused her impression of colonial Hong Kong. However, the inaccuracies are not at odds with the writer's intended designs. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Xu Xi first gained her fame and reputation as a writer in the United States. So, one should not overlook the fact that the first target audience are American readers, even though she is now also trying to establish herself as a local Hong Kong writer. Unlike Louise Ho, Wong Bik Wan and other Hong Kong writers, Xu Xi did not choose Hong Kong as her base when she first started her writing career. She was writing about Hong Kong but she was not writing for Hong Kong during that time. It was not until 2000 that the writer started to become conscious of her role as a local Hong Kong writer, and become involved in the cultivation and development of Anglophone literary culture of the ex-colony. It is obvious that the writer is constantly struggling to define herself and torn between her various roles, her obligations and vanity, her public and private selves. Problems of identity explain the ambivalence in her work. Even though Xu Xi fails to present a factually based and unequivocal image of Hong Kong, it is this uncertainty that best represents the situation of Hong Kong and opens out Xu Xi's

work to critical discussion.

It can be inferred that, when Xu Xi wrote about Hong Kong and the empire, she may not necessarily have had the intention to present the actual empire and the colony. The 1997 handover issue is not only a diplomatic negotiation between two countries but also a struggle of power between Western democracy and Chinese Communism,[116] Hong Kong has come under the spotlight on the stage of international politics. By using Hong Kong at the crossroad in 1997 as the setting of her novels, Xu Xi creates a mythic scene for her Western and especially her politics-conscious American audience who have been keeping a close eye on the decolonization of this East Asian city. Hong Kong is to some extent a name and a gimmick to attract the attention of her audience and to guarantee success for her books. Obviously, *Chinese Walls*, *Hong Kong Rose* and her other novels are structured as modern fairy tales. Ai Lin, Rose and most of the characters in Xu Xi's works are chasing their romantic dreams of love, and more accurately pursuing their American dreams. Xu Xi's stories are at this level universal success stories in the disguise of a post-colonial writing written by a "local" Hong Kong writer. Xu Xi is merely writing her "empire", an imaginary empire that suits the American taste instead of the actual British establishment in Hong Kong. She is a "Hong Kong writer" in the eyes of her American readers and her works have an oriental façade, an American essence and a universal theme. As a result, Rose and Ai Lin are actually Chinese-Americans with the appearance of Hongkongers, and their problems and experiences are similar to those of Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston's protagonists. Rose and Ai Lin's mothers are the literary

[116] Please refer to footnotes 12-6, Chapter One.

doubles of Jin Mei's and Kingston's mothers in *Joy Luck Club* and *The Woman Warrior*. They are the embodiment of traditional Chinese culture in the "foreign" land. The generation gap between the mothers and daughters is intensified by the cultural variance. Mother-daughter miscommunication symbolically represents the tension between Chinese and Western culture. While Brave Orchid, Kingston's mother, reinforces Chinese culture by "talking stories", Ai Lin's mother tries to consolidate the Chineseness of her western educated children by "saying their dynasties":

> "Say your dynasties," my mother commands, and we three children begin our recitation, first in Mandarin, then in Cantonese, while Mum listens for mistakes or mispronunciations in Mandarin, as if she could tell the difference. We drone our litany, a litany we know almost as well as the Our Father, Hail Mary and the I Believe....
>
> "Again," Mum commands. "You must always remember you are Chinese no matter where you might live. In Indonesia, when I was small, I could always recite the dynasties from the time when I was five. And it had been eight generations, eight, mind you, since my ancestors left Fukien for Java. But as my father always said, our family is pure Chinese blood through and through." (*Chinese Walls*, p.82)

Interestingly enough, even though the stories are situated in Hong Kong, an ethnic community, Xu Xi's characters experience an explicit cultural displacement. Ai Lin's mother's madness seems to have the same cause as LuLing's in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. Both of them represent a strong feeling of cultural nostalgia. They are driven mad because of their exile from their cultural homeland and linguistic isolation in an English speaking community. It is noticeable that Xu Xi merely draws on her American impression of an "English speaking community" and "British colonial

Empire" in creating her own version of "Hong Kong" in her novels.

## ii) Un-reading the Empire

As mentioned in the previous section, Xu Xi's indecision in positioning herself as a local/international writer makes the message of her works ambivalent. Apparently, *Chinese Walls* and *Hong Kong Rose* are two colonial works written about the colony from a socially-conservative Anglo-American view; nevertheless, it is not difficult to reveal a more sophisticated and unorthodox meaning behind the superficial message. And it is the job of the readers to deconstruct Xu Xi's colonial presentation of Hong Kong colonization and to "un-read" the postcolonial reality of the empire behind this Americanized and romanticized façade. The story of Xu Xi's *Hong Kong Rose* takes place between 1974 and 1987, with a double-plot structure: the present and the past. The temporal setting is a deliberate choice by the author as the period marks the drastic change that Hong Kong people experienced both psychologically and in their daily life. The novel actually starts with the return of Rose Kho from the United States and Paul Lie's entering into the law profession as well as the social world of Hong Kong in 1974. Though there is no explicit discussion, Xu Xi tries to make an analogy and reference to the situational and the general political atmosphere of the city in the period to build up the mood and the background of her novel. As a matter of fact, 1974 has a great significance in the initiation of the social and political changes of Hong Kong society since this was the year when *The Official Language Ordinance (Cap.5)* was passed. English and Chinese were both established as the official languages of Hong Kong for the purposes of communication between the

Government and the general public.[117] This ordinance introduces the reform of the Hong Kong governmental system and the social structure where the general ethnic Chinese majority cannot interact effectively with the English-speaking-elite dominated upper class. Paul, being a Eurasian, is the embodiment of the meeting of two cultures. With Paul's being chartered as a solicitor and Paul Sr.'s promotion to a judge, Xu Xi structures her plot as a symbolic echo of the actual legal situation in Hong Kong at that time. This suggests a breakthrough in the hierarchy of colonial Hong Kong society: the Lie lawyers signify a possibility of Chinese voices in the upper tier of society and authority.

However, *The Official Languages Ordinance* in 1974 was only a preliminary trial preparing for the transfer of power from colonial power to the colonized, and reform remained at a level of the superficial assurance.[118] Paul and his father seem to represent the spirit and ideal of the new generation of the legal system and social structure of Hong Kong, which should produce integration of the two cultures and essences of the English and Chinese legal and social spirits; nevertheless, this integration is partial and even problematic. Paul, as well as the legal system under the provision of the new ordinance, is Chinese only in terms of appearance, but still English and colonial deep in the core. Paul still conforms to his European heritage and speaks English both at home and in his law practice,

[117] In the Ordinance, Chinese was made of equal status to English in government official documents, schools and education as well as general use in public. However, due to both colonial bureaucratic considerations as well as the economic-financial factors (Hong Kong has been highly internationalized and heavily relying on foreign investment by then), bilingualism was actually enforced only in the communal governmental level. It was not until the eve of the 1997 handover that Chinese was practically used in the Legislative, Executive and Judiciary of Hong Kong. But till now, regardless of the rationale of this bilingualism policy, English remains the primary language used in the legal and jurisdiction area.

[118] Supra Note 112.

regardless of his knowledge of Mandarin and Chinese language. Likewise, the law and legal procedures are still enacted and enforced in English. Paul's Chinese appearance, like the co-existence of Chinese and English as the official languages in order to ease ethnic Chinese Hongkongers' hostility to the estranged foreign domination, is only a soothing agent to comfort the anxiety and inferior mentality of Rose's mother. In fact, the attempt to raise the status of Chinese language is like Paul's unpractised, broken Cantonese used in addressing Rose: "*Yuhnleung ngoh...Ngoh kou lei. Mhou leihoi nogh*" [Forgive me...I'm begging you. Please don't leave me] (173). It is a political gesture and an attempt at reconciliation designed to ease the hostility of Rose and her well-educated, independent young generation in Hong Kong.

The enactment of the 1974 ordinance carries a more significant meaning and pragmatic value to the economy and the government's relationship with the business sector. The marriage of Paul and Rose is also a symbolic marriage between the law, the guardian and upholder of colonial rule, and the economy, the wealthy businessmen of the society. Their marriage, as revealed in the latter part of the novel, is problematic; it is never a unique, spiritual union of the two individuals, the law and the economy, the colonial and the colonized as symbolized in the two characters. Paul has been using his marriage with Rose to cover up his homosexuality, whereas Rose's choice to maintain her null marriage relationship is a mixture of her love for Paul and the vanity that the marriage gives her. Therefore she chooses to accept Paul's absurd view on their marriage:

> We fit well together socially, even intellectually....

> We both manage quite well in Hong Kong. As our careers progress, we'll be able to travel independently of each other and do what we want out of sight of anyone that matters. And even if there is a little talk, it only helps our image.... We have all the choices in the world because we have the money, the education, the right social standing. We even love each other in our own way. What more can one demand for life? (*Hong Kong Rose*, p.245)

It is exactly the relationship between the colonial rule and the business sector to which Xu Xi wants to draw readers' attention. The adjustment of the law creates a stable and prosperous image of Hong Kong for the world. It benefits both the authority and the economy. On the other hand, Xu Xi is also trying to draw readers' attention to the reality behind the enactment of the Official Language Ordinance: the setting of Chinese as one of the official languages is only there to facilitate top-down rule. It enables an easier imposition of the authority on the general public, instead of allowing the public to be involved with the authority.

Furthermore, if Paul's sexual orientation is taken as a symbol, Paul's psychology reveals the crisis, struggle and turmoil that the whole legal system has to go through in response to the inevitable emergence of the historic moment of 1997. Paul, as a Westernized, educated young professional, apparently embodies the perfect integration of a British institution and Chinese culture, and so becomes a story for the success of a native Hongkonger under the British colonial system, and at the same time for the achievement of British rule in Chinese-ethnic Hong Kong. Therefore, Paul's homosexuality is an irony which the writer uses to remove the façade which the empire has put on both its colonial rule and the identity of Hong Kong. Xu Xi devotes her novel to discussion of the

life and struggle of her protagonists in the 1970s and early 80's. the ten-year period before the signing of *Sino-British Joint Declaration* in 1984. Though the general public might not have yet realized this enormous political change, it is producing an undercurrent of turmoil in the ideology, the colonial governmental system, and the social elites which this story describes. Paul's painful dilemma of choice between his masculinity and femininity, his reputation and his liberation, as well as Rose's bitter acceptance of her husband's sexuality, offers readers a metaphorical way of looking at the colonial government's attempts to adjust its relation with the problematic sovereignty of the city. Paul's double life with Rose and Man Yee (his homosexual lover) can best illustrate the adjustment the colonial government is trying to make in neutralizing the British colonial and the Chinese general public's involvement in the legal, social aspect of the society. Paul is, like the colonial government, on the one hand unwilling to give up his reputation and fame which largely relies on his superficially harmonious marriage with Rose, its de jure power over the city, but on the other, cannot repress and deny his femininity and the forbidden feeling towards Man Yee, along with the de facto power of China over the place. Socially, the problem seems less complicated with Paul's sharing his public life with Rose and private life with Man Yee. Yet, it remains a problem legally. Ironically, the triangular relationship between Paul, Rose and Man Yee as well as between Hong Kong, Britain and China is totally problematic in law. It is not until 1987 that there seems to be a break to the entanglement in Xu Xi's ending of her story with Rose's departure to the United States and the possibility of obtaining a green card. This was the year in which the Official Languages Ordinance was amended to allow

laws to be enacted in English or Chinese. The problem, however, has not been solved, but delayed.

## IV Symbolic Diaspora

On the surface, Xu Xi's novels illustrate the multicultural and transnational identity of Hong Kong; but, if we read the imperfect linguistic assimilation emblematically, her works are symbolically diasporic. From Xu Xi's point of view, Hongkongers may have experienced the same sense of exile as Chinese-Americans. Even though Hongkongers may not have been physically uprooted like the Chinese-Americans in Tan's and Kingston's novels, they are politically, intellectually, culturally and linguistically exiled and alienated. The law of bilingualism well represents the exiling of Hong Kong linguistic identity. Owing to the history of colonization, Hong Kong has been obliged to adopt English institutions and an English legal system. This blemish of colonization is perpetuated by the use of English language in law; even the enforcement of bilingualism can never undo English domination in the ex-colony. Given the preeminence of the use of Cantonese within the Chinese community, the tension between the two linguistic selves of Hong Kong is greatly intensified. Hong Kong becomes seriously divided between its English practical public self and its private, Cantonese existential self. The bleakness of a sense of self-exile and rootlessness is experienced by Hongkongers even though they are physically "at home".

Xu Xi confesses in her essay "Writing the Literature of Non-denial" that she experiences a sense of cultural exile even when she is at home in Hong Kong:

> Writing contemporary fiction in English as a Hong Kong person serves up a creative conundrum. Am I, at some level, rejecting the Cantonese literary heritage of my native city? Does it not affect the creative process, enhancing or infecting it with 'foreign' influences inherent in contemporary English, further muddled by the weight of national and world literatures in the English language? Is my voice 'authentic' in any way, or is my writing merely a fringe literature, reflecting a minority perspective that simply cannot be considered the 'real Hong Kong'? Or worse, do I get relegated to *gwailo* 'foreign devil' Hong Kong literature, a voice for those who are 'belongers' only because of a residency status conferred alike to non-Chinese newcomers, long-term residents, as well as those who can claim actual birthright, all in the name of *laissez-faire* capitalism?
>
> I am of partial Chinese ancestry, the lesser part being Indonesian. Pearl S. Buck cannot make this claim, but her Chinese literacy is far better than mine. Maxine Hong Kingston, on the other hand, can make a pure bloodline claim of ancestry, yet no one would mistake her for a Chinese writer, least of all the Hong Kong Chinese. I was born and raised in Hong Kong, and lived both a young and middle-aged adult life here in between sojourns and residencies in the West and elsewhere in Asia. The result is that my creative process is simultaneously constrained and heightened by ethnicity and culture.[119]

She feels that because of her multicultural heritage she is estranged from her home city. She expresses her self-doubt about her role as a writer, and also about the intentions of her writing. In this essay, Xu Xi responds to accusations of authenticity in the representation of colonialism and Hong Kong in her novels. She reveals the frustration that she faces as an

[119] Xu Xi, "Writing the Literature of Non-denial" in *Asian Englishes Today: Hong Kong English Autonomy and Creativity*, Kingsley Bolton (ed), pp 219-37 (220)

Anglophone writer in Hong Kong, and as a Chinese writer who writes in English. To her, to be loyal to her Chinese culture and ethnicity is more of an obligation imposed on her than a sentiment which she genuinely feels. She reveals this feeling through her protagonists in the novels:

> "[...] you must always be proud of being a Chinese no matter where you are. Because Chinese people are smart and successful, and don't ever forget that...". (*Chinese Walls*, p.1).

Like Kingston's mother, Ai Lin's mother also tries to impose on her children a Chinese ethnic identity by telling them "the dynasties" and indoctrinating them with Chinese culture. To speak Chinese language and to learn Chinese culture are gestures of loyalty, a demonstration of one's Chineseness and patriotism rather than a form of practicality. Ai Lin's mother makes children study Chinese in order to show others that they are Chinese. Ai Lin is forced to study Chinese at school even though she is not good at it and it is not a compulsory subject. She fails all of her Chinese exams and is almost held back from progression because of the poor Chinese results. Chinese language and identity are an inflexible confinement to her. Moreoever, Xu Xi finds Chinese a burden which threatens her creativity and authorial autonomy. She cannot fully locate her voice and her subjectivity when she has to adjust continually between the English voice and the Chinese voice of the characters in order to suit the ear of her audience from various backgrounds. She feels the tension between the problem of language and her creative development as "a 'local' Hong Kong novelist [who] is, by literary, political, geographic and even social definition, Chinese", since she accepts that her work should

reflect "[her] country's literary tradition, history and social condition."[120] Writing in English, a "foreign language" in Hong Kong, displaces her from the conventional Chinese literary setting of her city, and threatens her identity not only as a local writer but also as an ethnic Chinese.

Like Ai Lin's failure to pass her Chinese exams, Xu Xi's inability to write about Hong Kong in Chinese is a disempowering experience. While Ai Lin is labelled as a "*jaahp jung*" because of her fluency in English, the authenticity of the representation of Hong Kong in Xu Xi's novels is challenged due to the writer's decision to write in English. The Indonesian-Hong Kong Anglophone writer finds herself in the same situation of facing the clash between her Chinese innate identity and her adopted English tongue as Maxine Hong Kingston, and many other overseas Chinese writers. However, she finds the problem that she is facing is far more perplexing and the criticism more severe. Kingston's identity as an ethnic minority writer is less ambivalent. Possessing a Cantonese mind and Cantonese ears inherited from her mother as well as her facility in the English tongue developed in America place her in a legitimate position to write about the Diaspora. It gives her recognition both as a Chinese writer in the Anglo-American world, and as an Anglophone writer in the ethnic Chinese community, at home and overseas without any discrepancy. Ironically, Xu Xi is trapped in a paradoxical situation as she feels a strong sense of displacement even when she is at home. And this feeling of marginalization is not simply the result of the failure to gain recognition from the Chinese speaking readership in Hong Kong. She finds her English inadequate as a means of full communication with her Cantonese-speaking

[120] Xu Xi, "Writing the Literature of Non-denial", p.221.

readers. She sees "[her] linguistic environment [as having] limited scope":

> The problem [is] that the English I 'heard' from these characters was second language fluency, and as such, limited in expression. Their Cantonese would be the utterances of adults, but writing in English did not mean I wanted to translate Cantonese. Another problem was that as the influence of British culture waned, British did not resonate accurately in the voices of fictional local characters, unless it was a British person or British-educated local speaking English.[121]

This problem of language is symbolically represented by the motif of food in *Hong Kong Rose*:

> Dinner was a bland black mushroom soup, rice with an indifferent chicken and overcooked mustard greens. This was followed by a watery custard for dessert. Their Chinese servant, complete with a white and black samfoo and waist length pigtail, served Western style, with an array of silverware too elaborate for the meal. (4)

Local Cantonese culture, just like the Chinese dishes in Lies household, loses its essence and becomes bland, indifferent and tasteless, through the attempt to serve it in a Western style. By the same token the local culture, just like an authentic local dish such as hotpot favoured by Rose's family, is "indecent", too elaborate and wasteful in its preparation to suit Paul's Westernized taste. The local Anglophone writer feels that she is linguistically exiled even though she writes at home.

To make the situation worse, while Rose is accused of being too close to America, and Ai Lin is a *wah kiu* and Westernized girl without an English name, Xu Xi, as a cultural transmitter, an Anglophone writer in the

[121] Ibid, p.226.

Chinese speaking community of Hong Kong, faces a rejection of her English voice. The English speaking writer notices the "impurity" in her English when compared to authentic English. Her English voice is a mixture of two national Englishes: British and American, as well as South-east Asian ungrammatical English and sometimes, though not very often, Chinglish. She fails to express the local voice in English, and also finds that her multicultural voice is unable to represent any single place and culture with which she is connected. She is trapped at the margins of East and West, regional and local. Xu Xi's feeling of displacement is not the result of a physical exile; rather, it is a cultural exile and a mental diaspora caused by the rootlessness of Hong Kong culture and her own cultural heritage.

But again, in her novels, Xu Xi adopts a post-colonial perspective in examining colonial Hong Kong. She succeeds in revealing the turbulence that the whole society and its ideology have experienced in this decolonizing period by placing the years between 1974 and 1987 in the foreground and depicting her male protagonist as a lawyer in order to represent what is problematic about colonial rule in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the author reserves her right to comment on the result of this decolonization by giving a "non-ending" to her novel. Indeed, Xu Xi does not finally accept the marginality of herself as an Anglophone Hong Kong writer, or the rootlessness of Hong Kong identity. In keeping with the hopeful "non-ending" of her stories, she suggests that Supergirl and Peter Pan have no nationality and "nothing that matters does". She sees beyond the marginality and displacement of her multi-lingual and cultural background, and resolves to turn this diasporic situation into an

empowering force of creativity. Through the giving up of the "nationality" of her heroine Supergirl, her creative work is no longer limited by the history, culture, tradition, politics and language of her city. Finally, her creativity is not confined by any categorizations of local literature, world literature, or English writing and Chinese writing. It is only through giving up the nationality of her work that she can gain total creative autonomy.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## *Moving from Gender Roles to the Epiphany of Hong Kong identity*

### I. Local History and Regional Identity

Unlike Xu Xi and Louise Ho, Agnes Lam never explicitly proclaims her identity as a Hongkonger. From her view of history, readers may be able to glimpse the Singaporean-Hong Kong poet's perception of identity. While Xu Xi presents her view of the problematic postcolonial history by juxtaposing the private and public sense of time, and displaying the competition between personal memory and the major scale of history, and Louise Ho re-examines the major political events of Hong Kong in her poems, Agnes Lam's poetry is relatively apolitical and the themes of her work focus mainly on domestic and social issues. As Edwin Thumboo observes,

> To the individual, the sense of the past consists less of history studied and more of history casually read, heard and assimilated as part of the ordinary, routine present. Here you have the second, complementary set, one satisfying broad interests and specific curiosities. Paradoxically, powerfully held, the more orderly the social process the greater the disinclination to separate prejudice from considered opinion. There is comfort in numbers perhaps. Unless there is reason, our knowledge of history remains elementary, popular, garnered from secondary school texts, kept alive by the mass media and occasionally focused by the history behind the politics [...]. We can neither escape that longer sense nor desist from revising it; our experience contributes by adding and subtracting, thus linking both sets, creating conduits through which past and present exert mutual

influence.[122]

It is obvious that, unlike her contemporaries, Agnes Lam has no ambition to represent the public political past in her work in order to gain the identification of the readers and establish a shared identity. In fact, the poet rarely makes any historical references except in “Ten” and “When the rain came”. This transnational poet simply presents her indistinct view of the past, which is based on personal experience and hearsay. As a result, the events portrayed are largely subjective and mediated by her preference and emotional attachment to places. Interestingly, readers will find that instead of focusing on the history of Hong Kong, Agnes Lam includes Singaporean events as part of her personal historical memory. Such a move reflects the poet's seeming emotional detachment from her homeland.

Agnes Lam wrote “Ten” at Stanley, Hong Kong in 1983. Stanley is one of the most famous beaches in the southern part of Hong Kong Island overseeing the South China Sea. As has been said in the earlier section, the image of the sea plays an important role in many of Agnes Lam's poems. Hong Kong is a small island surrounded by the sea, while Victoria Harbour helps the city to gain its reputation as the one of the best ports in the world; the sea has become the basis for the prosperity of the city. The meaning of the Chinese name of Hong Kong is “Fragrant Harbour” and hence, very often, just like in “Sixteen years”, the harbour is used as the metonym of the city. On the surface, “Ten” seems to be the memory flashback of the persona, celebrating the happy, worry-free time she had when she was ten. However, what the sea breeze brings back is also the memory of the past of Hong Kong. The “swing in the breeze/ a song on the wind” of the seaside

[122] Edwin Thumboo. "Notes on a Sense of History" in *The Writer's Sense of the Past*, ed. Kirpal Singh. NUS: Singapore University Press, 1987: 223-233.

of Hong Kong Island does not only bring back the childhood memory of the persona; at the same time it stirs up her nostalgic feelings towards the past:

> There were no famines.
> Everyone had a job.
> Vietnam was in the papers.
> I was ten. ("Ten")

The memory of the persona flashes back to Hong Kong in the 1960s when she was ten. Agnes Lam belongs to the generation who spent her childhood in late 1950s and 60s. As a matter of fact, Louise Ho, Xu Xi and Agnes Lam are the first generation which was born after the Second World War. They grew up together with post-war Hong Kong and witnessed the rapid social and economic development of the colony. Therefore, the 1960s has merged together with their childhood memory and personal growth and become part of the collective memory of many of contemporary Hong Kong's writers. While Hong Kong was experiencing its economic boom, however, the whole world was actually suffering from the general unsettled atmosphere of the Cold War, the threat of Communist terror, and also the Vietnam Civil War during the 1960s. At the same time, Hong Kong also experienced two riots initiated by Communist supporters. So, the wars, the riots and economic growth have inevitably become the themes of many of Louise Ho's and Xu Xi's works. However, Agnes Lam is not actively involved in recapturing history in her work; her version of public history is subtly integrated into her personal memory. History is ambiguously presented in "Ten". The poet continues using her cheerful style in this lyrical poem and dissolves the heaviness of all these political and economic events into the lightheartedness of a childhood memory stirred up by the

breeze. But Thumboo points out:

> The individual's sense of the past as experienced therefore consists of more than a sense of formal history, which is the politics of yesterday and the day before. It is that sense which predicates his view of life and contacts, which determines the proportions of his understanding. Time modulates the feel of history. The angularities, the traumas of a cycle, of change or revolution - the great Depression of the Thirties and the impact of radical political and religious ideologies as they affected our part of the world are examples - i.e. whether public or private, fade with time, as their contextualising historical moment recedes with the passing of their key actors. The full drama of their consequences and altering force settles; what is contemporary inevitably alters, simplifies into significances and explanations. Unless unforgivable or unforgettable in their impact such as the Nazi annihilation of Jews, events acquire a patina. Thus absorbed into the folk and collective memory, they become part of the major social, intellectual, literary and other traditions of a society.[123]

Due to the fact that the persona was only ten when the Vietnam Civil War and the two riots in Hong Kong took place, these two historical events were indirect and impersonal experiences that the young persona gathered from the media. These threats were as surreal to her as the breezy scene at the beach.

However subtle the political implication may be, the rare occasion of her engaging in the discussion of politics is significant as it represents retrospection of her identity. Moreover, readers should never overlook the political context in which the poem was written: 1983, a year before the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration. This poem subtly reveals the

[123] Ibid

poet's feelings at the eve of the signing. The possibility of returning Hong Kong to Communist China brings back the persona's childhood memory of the Vietnamese Civil War. Yet the persona feels distant and detached from the anxiety that many of the people of Hong Kong shared at that time as the fear of Communist China is more a piece of memory imposed on her which she neither experiences nor remembers. At the same time, as Thumboo suggests, this memory, without actual experience, fades easily with the passage of time. As a result, the persona is stirred, but only slightly, by the undercurrent of a major political change: her "heart [is]/ the noon breeze,/ the melody on the swing,/ and warm steps of stone."

By contrast, Agnes Lam seems to be describing a more detailed history of Singapore in "When the rain came". In this poem, the Hong Kong-born poet retells the history of Singapore in 1963-4 when the country was threatened by the possible danger of drought and the government-imposed country-wide water rationing. Interestingly, though this part of the history may be an important piece of collective memory of Singaporeans, Agnes Lam never experienced it as she was still living in Hong Kong during the 1960s. Upon her, the Singapore-Hong Kong poet resettled herself in Singapore. Not only did this marriage give her an extra family in Singapore, but it also provided her with a new identity:

> Drought by Singapore standards
> Is sixty-five per cent of reservoir.
> In many other countries,
> That would have been plenty.
> But in Singapore
> we plan ahead. ("When the rain came")

By narrating this historical event in a "we" perspective, the persona attempts to construct the collective memory of Singaporeans. At the same

time, by using this collective pronoun "we", Agnes Lam actually tries to claim this event that she has never experienced as part of her memory and she is determined to adopt this collective memory and adopt the Singaporean identity embedded in it.

Readers may be skeptical of the readiness of the Singaporean-Hong Kong poet to embrace an adopted identity of Singapore while she is so ready to give up her Hong Kong identity. And "Petals" may be able to give her readers an explanation of her emotional detachment from the history of Hong Kong and the political events that Hong Kong was experiencing. In this poem, Agnes Lam talks about her transnational experience and her perception of her identity:

> in three countries
> I can grow
> if but a little
> each time
> I transplant

She compares herself as a plant: the way that she moves from Hong Kong to Singapore to America is like a plant being transplanted from one place to another. From her point of view, her identity is not a rigid and fixed one. It can be uprooted and is fluid and transformable. She "can grow/ if but a little". Even if only a little, her identity is able to grow and develop through her transnational experience. She survives the harsh time of each transplantation and blooms:

> extremes in America
> modulated in Hong Kong
> negligible on the Equator
> but always
> petals unfurling
> I thrive

on the spectrum
of colours smells noises
temperatures humidities
degrees of pollution
in the pervading air

The Singaporean-Hong Kong poet does not see the fluidity of her identity, the fact that she has to be uprooted from place to place, as a limitation and a disadvantage: instead, she is determined to grow rootlessly as she claims: "without roots/ I grow" ("Petals"). Looked at it from another perspective, this reveals the fact that the transnational poet has no desire to pin herself down and settle down at one place and with one single identity. At the last part of the poem, she makes an intertextual reference to Ezra Pound's "at the metro station":

mere petals
of scent and light
dissipated and mangled
in an afternoon storm

as the traffic
halts on the red light
and pedestrians
cross in their umbrellas ("Petals")

Agnes Lam borrows Pound's mood and images in the description of a scene of the rainy and busy city afternoon to reflect her view of the transience and complex nature of modern society and existence.

Her various relationships in life can be related to her different identities. Readers may be skeptical of Agnes Lam's effort in claiming her Singaporean identity while she readily detaches herself from Hong Kong, her origin. But a close study of the poet's biographical background enables a justification of her choice of identity. Even though Agnes Lam's poems

mainly focus on female issues, if readers are willing to read into the subtext of her work, the relationships she portrays offer symbolic meanings reflecting on her linguistic and cultural identity. It is noticeable that all the poems about Singapore were written during the time when the poet was living in this Southeast Asian country. It is in Singapore where the Hong Kong born poet married her Singaporean husband, set up a new family and started her career and relocated her roots. Through marriage, Agnes Lam adopted her family-in-law in Singapore and at the same time, she adopted her new identity as a Singaporean. Yet, while consciously, she attempts to make an effort to claim and construct her Singaporean identity by writing poems depicting Singapore history and life, subconsciously, she shows her feeling of marginality through her discussion of the problem of communication with her in-laws as a foreign bride.

Agnes Lam's poems written before 1990 are full of explicit references to Singapore landscape and lifestyle, and to cultural imagery of this multicultural country at the Equator. "On the ECP" and "The road taken" are poems written to depict the landscape of Singapore. Since Agnes Lam was a new settler now relocated in a new environment, she is enthusiastic in assimilating to her newly adopted home. The two poems which the Singaporean poet wrote to depict her driving experience on the ECP, East Coast Parkway in Singapore, are not merely the presentation of her physical journey in exploring the landscape of Singapore where there is "sea on the left,/ bougainvilleas down the middle,/ symmetrical trees either side" ("On the ECP). The ride is also a psychological journey reflecting the inner state of mind of the persona. It reflects Agnes Lam's perception of her new home and her newly adopted identity. And in the poem "The road

taken", the poet obviously makes an intertextual reference to Robert Frost's "The Road not Taken" in revealing the migrated poet's view of her identity:

> So why not choose
> the road I like
> where driving is freer,
> trees greener, sea breeze clearer,
> memories dearer,
> though it may be longer?
>
> So many other things
> in life – you cannot choose.

By borrowing Frost's idea, the poet expresses her view of the choice of life she pursues. The path that she has taken may not be "less traveled by",[124] but definitely, like Frost, she has chosen a path which brings her more memorable experiences rather than one which offers the fastest way to her destination. We find that this poem echoes Louise Ho's "Hong Kong at Cross Road". Even though Agnes Lam focuses on her individual pursuit of identity and never really tries to elevate her view to a societal level in creating a collective identity for Hong Kong, her attempt to choose and constructing her identity is a reflection of the reality of the identity crisis and psychological struggle that many individual Hongkongers experience.

Yet the poem ends with a sorrowful note expressing the mood of helplessness and powerlessness. Despite the conscious effort of the transnational poet's effort to choose her own route in life, she exclaims that her choice is actually limited as "so many other things/ in life – you cannot choose" ("The Road Taken"). As when she compares herself as a plant being transplanted in "Petals", Agnes Lam reveals feeling of her lack of

---

[124] Robert Frost, "The Road not Taken" in *Complete Poems of Robert Frost*. (Cape: London, 1956) p. 126.

autonomy in choosing her life and her identity. Regardless of how well she tries to struggle to survive, to cope with her new family and assimilate to her new environment, as a rootless plant which she depicts in "Petals", she is unable to take control of the situation. Instead, she is uprooted and "transplanted", and so constrained by situations and circumstances in her life. "The road taken" was written in 1990, the year when her first marriage fell apart and she returned to Hong Kong. Indeed, whatever the effort the Hong Kong-born poet made in assimilating herself to Singaporean society, like her relationship with her mother-in-law, it is an effort in vain. She is marginalized. The Singaporean self is like the Teochew dialect spoken by her mother-in-law, whereas her Hong Kong self is Cantonese; they are never communicable and reconcilable even though, on the surface, they share the same ancestor.

## II. Home as a household and the Home with the Blood Lineage

Agnes Lam's notion of her transnational identity can also be inferred from the portrayal of home in her poems. For this transterritorial poet, the concept of home can be classified on various levels, and the meaning of it differs in different contexts. Home, primarily, is the place where she lives. It can be America, it can be Singapore and it can be Hong Kong. At the same time, home is her family, the family she has formed with her husband. Like her perception of identity, Agnes Lam's view of home changes drastically in 1989-90. The two major events which happened during that time brought a marked change of her view of her life. While the poet openly refers to the death of her mother in many of her works, she never explicitly talks about the failure of her first marriage. Yet, these two

events, happening almost at the same time, become the turning point of her identity. If the falling apart of her relationship is Agnes Lam's awakening to the insubstantiality of her adopted Singaporean identity and the superficiality of her adopted "home", the death of her mother marks her realization of the security and inseparability that her latent Hong Kong identity offers her. It is only on the death of her mother that she realizes that home, or the psychological home that is the dearest to her is her parents, her family in Hong Kong. Even though she has uprooted herself from Hong Kong and resettled in a new country, Hong Kong, like her family, has an inseparable link to her. No matter how far away she is from the city, Hong Kong remains her home psychologically.

As I have said, Agnes Lam has no intention to portray a fixed and unambiguous idea of Hong Kong identity in her poems: her poems more generally examine the nature of individual identity in the contemporary world. Many of her poems focus on her experience as a woman trying to juggle and accomplish various roles that traditionally society tries to impose on her and those she has newly and unconventionally adopted. Being an overseas student, an expatriate intellectual, a cross-border wife, a foreign daughter-in-law, a daughter away from home, even though Agnes Lam never explores it explicitly, the theme of cross-cultural experience, multilingualism, linguistic identity crisis and cultural diaspora is subtly revealed in the subtext of her work.

### *Mother-Daughter Relationship*

Amongst all her varied roles, daughterhood is the one which Agnes Lam most frequently discusses. The poems "Holiday at home", "A wicker

basket", "Silk underwear" and "Sixteen years" are all written to express the persona's mourning of and memory of her deceased mother. As was said earlier, Agnes Lam does not demonstrate her ambition to embrace a bigger self as the spokesperson of Hong Kong or any other cultures; her poems are highly biographical and focus primarily on her personal self and private life. Instead of directly addressing the mother-daughter relationship, the poems are written in a confessional mood in which the daughter, the persona, reveals her remorse for the long absence from home and inability to fulfill her duty as a daughter to take care of her mother. In the two poems "A wicker basket" and "Silk underwear", Agnes Lam talks about the death of her mother. Both poems are highly narrative in their nature, and through narrating in detail the way she and her siblings arranged and organized the funeral, the poet-persona expresses her grief for her mother. In "A wicker basket", the plainness and dryness of her language, just like the cold and harsh weather, "eight degrees centigrade", on the day of her mother's death, reflects the bleakness and cruelty the persona has to confront in facing the heartbreaking reality of the death of her mother. The images of whiteness of the cloth, the face of the mother as well as the image of the decoration in the mortuary, all show a strong sense of lifelessness of the whole atmosphere and the coldness and hopelessness of the inner state of mind of the persona.

The way she unfolds the truth is a reflection of the psychological changes undergone in accepting this cruel fact. It shows the way the person comes to term with the reality and the way she gradually accepts the fact that her mother is gone:

> Mother was on the upper deck.

A white cloth wrapped her.
They laid her stretcher on the floor.
One end of the cloth lifted.

I saw the top of Mother's grey hair.
Philip nodded.
Gregory wiped his forehead.
My sister cried. ("A wicker basket")

The earlier half of the poem, by using the direct address "Mother", shows that subconsciously, the persona has not accepted the fact that her mother is dead until she sees the corpse of her mother. The detailed description of the setting of the mortuary in the hospital, the "stainless steel cabinets", "the upper deck", "the white cloth", the "stretcher" as well as Gregory's comment that "the face has shrunk to the bone" show the starkness of the fact which the daughter is no longer able to escape from acknowledging, yet the unemotional language, the plainness of its style and the artlessness used by the poet symbolize the cold and harsh reality which creates a sharp contrast with the piercing pain that it gives the persona:

And I saw them move
through the back door
my white mother
in a wicker basket –

at eight degrees Centigrade,
my tears dropped. ("A wicker basket")

Seeing the dead body of her mother, the persona goes through a process of emotional detachment. What the workmen move away is not only the body of the person's mother. They take away from her the last bit of hope, the last source of connection with the mother. The daughter's strongly emotionally attached "Mother" is now being dehumanized and objectified as a lifeless estranged entity, "my white mother", whose present state (as

dead) is so alien and unfamiliar to the persona. Visually, the phrase "my white mother" also symbolizes the change in physical form that death has brought to the mother. She is now fragile and delicate; this is very different from the image of being caring and protective which a mother usually gives to her children. Indeed, the whole poem is composed in a very controlled manner and it is only at the end of the poem that the poet uses the only emotionally charged word "tears". The mood conveyed by the last line successfully heightens the artless and sorrowful tone of the whole poem. By ending the poem with "my tears dropped", a short line consisting of only three monosyllabic words, the poet is able to create a striking effect of demonstrating the almost inexpressible pain that such event has brought to the persona.

The melancholic mood persists in "Silk underwear". This poem follows "A wicker basket". Furthering the pursuit of the theme of death, Agnes Lam moves on to depicting her mother's funeral in the memorial of the deceased. Like "A wicker basket", the poem is written in a self-deceiving way in order to show the immense sense of loss that the death has brought her, resulting in her inability to accept the truth. Not even once does Agnes Lam explicitly mention death in the poem: it is left to the readers to deduce the message from the religious symbols and funeral imagery she uses such as "coverlets with a silver cross" and "wreaths of quiet blooms". In the first two lines the poem: "Silk underwear, embroidered shoes,/ our last chance to spend on you" ("Silk underwear"), the calmness of her tone is part of the subtle way she indirectly communicates the death of her mother. The poet chooses to face this heartbreaking news in a dignified and controlled manner instead of

lamenting her pain in a devastated way. But it is exactly the understatement Agnes Lam uses that intensifies the sorrowful mood behind the "last chance [of the persona] to spend on [her mother]".

Not only does persona try to undermine the notion of death in her poem, but she also attempts to create an illusion that her mother is still alive. The way she expresses her mourning for her mother is by talking to her, the addressee "you" in the poem, as if she is still alive, which further reveals the inexplicable pain hidden behind her controlled manner. The whole poem is written in couplets. It creates a rhythmic pattern and a strong musicality for the poem. By adopting this songlike effect together with the gentleness and softness of the tone, the poet makes this poem imitate a lullaby. This effect subtly suggests to the readers that the persona has made a compromise in accepting the death of her mother. She attempts to comfort herself by viewing her mother's death as a long sleep instead of an eternal farewell. Worrying that she would disturb her mother from her long rest, she talks to her mother softly by singing to her gently in this lullaby. Besides, this lullaby-like style also suggests a recurring theme of the change in the relationship between mother and daughter. Just as "A wicker basket" suggests, old age, sickness and death have transformed the once strong and protective mother into a fragile, delicate and helpless "white mother". By singing this lullaby to her mother to sleep, the poet figuratively illustrates the switching of the mother-daughter position:

> Love and mercy and rest bestow –
> up the hill my mother would go.
>
> Brothers and sister following,
> I, the youngest, trailing.

How you yelled behind in schooldays past
for them to wait as I was last.

Mother, this hill we now climb –
you are not behind me. ("Silk underwear")

The last section of the poem is not only the narration of the scene of the burial of the mother. The poet has internalized the scene as a memory flashback to her childhood. Time has brought changes to both the mother and the daughter. The persona, the youngest in the family, has grown up and is no longer the weakest and slowest whom the mother needs to take extra care of while the mother is no longer able to yell at them. Rather, it is the daughter's turn to repay her love and care to the mother, and to escort the mother to the place where she has her eternal sleep and to sing to her and protect her in her sleep. However, regardless of the transience of life, there is one thing that can withstand time and remain unchanged: "Love and mercy and rest bestow". The love between the mother and daughter will never end because of their separation by death.

As her mother is now completely under her protection, the persona has to ensure everything is well-arranged so that her mother will be able to have a comfortable sleep. By giving the title "Silk underwear" and focusing on the trifles such as "silk underwear", "embroidered shoes", "cheongsam", "old fashioned mink", "coral set", "mahjong set", the poet seems to, on the one hand, de-emphasize the heaviness of the sorrow of death with the lively imagery; but on the other hand, she is able to draw readers' attention to the fact that it is "[her] last chance to spend on [her mother]". The seeming contrast between the triviality of the things she depicts and the final sending off of her mother shows the persona's

determination to pay her last respect to her mother by accomplishing the last task for her perfectly. She wants to make sure even the most minor details like the daily necessities, "silk underwear" and entertainment, the "mahjong set", are taken care of so that she can ensure her mother will have a comfortable afterlife.

***Being a Daugter-in-law***

Agnes Lam's poems explore the near-infinite roles of women in contemporary society. The poet moves on to discuss her role as a daughter-in-law in the poem "My mother-in-law". Through her light-hearted "sing-song" narrative style, the poet demonstrates to her readers the traditionally antagonistic relationship of mother and daughter-in-law that every married woman has to face. By tactfully adopting the genre of a ballad, Agnes Lam stylistically illustrates the tension between the traditions and contemporary social values in her poem. Even though the change in society and social values of the contemporary world has altered the role of women in society, women have to take up a lot of social responsibilities instead of focusing simply on the domestic roles which they used to; however, they are still unable to escape from the traditional stereotyping imposed by customs and old values.

> My mother-in-law –
> I am supposed to be
> always quarrelling with her,
> According to Chinese folklore.
>
> But I do not speak Teochew,
> nor is her English even basilectal
> Mutual learning is a possibility

but she's too old and I'm too busy.

Many times though, my sisters-in-law
have called me to post-umpire
a verbal score between one of them
and my mother in law.

You tell me, Agnes-
who is right?
Have I not tried hard enough?
Such a small thing and she curse and curse –

And I, your favourite daughter-in-law
have only ears and no words
for my mother-
or sisters-in-law.

Through the song-like narrative poem Agnes Lam reveals, as an individual and a woman, the problems and burdens that she has to face in juggling her various roles. The rise of the female's status in the society never changes the role of a wife in her husband's family, and in the event has created more tension and difficulties for the daughter-in-law. While the daughter-in-law, in the case of Agnes Lam, is "too busy" with work, still, duties like "mutual learning", filial piety to the mother-in-law are always expected from her. She has to listen to her mother-in-law's complaints, to mediate between her sisters- and mother-in-law, and most importantly, to have "only ears and no words".

If the mother-daughter relationship is a loving and comforting one as the poet presents it, then the mother-daughter-in-law relationship is warfare. Regardless of how well the persona is trying to fulfill her duty as a daughter-in-law, the social values always discredit her. While the social expectation frames the code of behaviour of a virtuous daughter-in-law and

takes away the individual rights and freedom of the persona, society at the same time stereotypes the malicious quality of the daughter-in-law and undercuts her virtues:

My mother-in-law
had a sudden fall –
caused by a tumour
benign in the brain.

The operation was successful
-- too much so,
a wicked daughter-in-law
would have thought.

But why should anyone worry?
Even before the operation,
you had decided to come and live
with me – your favourite in-law.

Gone – my roaming in shopping centres,
pizza dinners by special delivery
or last night's leftovers
microwaved for another meal.

No longer can I work
late beyond air-con time
or early in the morning
switch on the music.

While things the persona does for her mother are a wholehearted sacrifice, what she does for the mother-in-law is a struggle of concession to which she is forced to give in most unwillingly. Even so, her effort is treated with skepticism and is not always appreciated as she is "supposed to be/ always quarrelling with her [mother-in-law,/ according to Chinese folklore".

And as in the poems about her relationship with her mother. this poem has also embedded in it a cultural level of meaning behind this in-law

relationship. Agnes Lam's first husband is a Singaporean, and her marriage is therefore the representation of the marriage between two cultures. Although Singapore shares a similar cultural background to Hong Kong in being strongly under the influence of British colonialism and Chinese migrant's culture, the cultures of the two places have evolved differently due to years of assimilation and localization. As a result, the mother-daughter-in-law tension is further problematized by this intercultural conflict. This relationship is actually the embodiment of the cultural estrangement that Agnes Lam faces in a foreign country. Indeed, the lines "But I do not speak Teochew[126],/nor is her English even basilectal" do not suggest a mere language barrier between the persona and her mother-in-law. They symbolize the impossibility of communication between the two sets of values, two kinds of local sub-cultures (both derived from Chinese culture), two generations of the old and the new. Agnes Lam's problem with her husband's family is not simply caused by her identity as a foreign bride. "Teochew" represents the old and traditional Chinese values which all *wah kiu* especially the older generation, cherish and try to preserve so as to link them to their cultural homeland, whereas Lam's English marks the Westernized mentality, the new cosmopolitan values, Anglo-American education system that the younger generation fancies. As a Chinese, the persona feels obliged to follow and take up the traditional values, such as her obligation to serve the mother-in-law; yet, being culturally assimilated by Western education and ideology, this "Teochew" becomes distant and incomprehensible to her.

---

126 Teochew is a dialect originates from Canton province in China. Together with Hokkien and Hakka, Teochew is one of the most dominant dialect groups in the Chinese community in Singapore.

As opposed to her Singaporean identity, her family in Hong Kong is the symbol of her inherited Hong Kong identity which she did not make any effort to claim before 1989. While her husband's family represents her adopted identity in Singapore which the poet tries to claim and hold on to, her mother in Hong Kong is the embodiment of her family, her home and her Hong Kong identity which she has neglected and denied. The sorrow of the loss of the mother has turned into a great sense of guilt in "Sixteen years". This poem is written in Bedok, Singapore, one month after the funeral of the poet's mother. The poem is written in an unusual graphic pattern:

**Sixteen years**

One night
I had a dream

a large restaurant balcony
overlooking the Hong Kong harbour
all six of us
took Mother out for dinner
Mother was lying down
on a couch in the balcony
I tried to lift her
but she would not rise
I felt her heart
it was beating
but she would not rise
heavy beyond my strength
on her lap I saw
that day's paper
an article
with Mother's photo
something about her

a letter to me

in Chinese she wrote

my little princess

my little princess

you have at last

come back

after sixteen years.

On waking, I counted
sixteen years
from when I first left
to going home for her funeral.

Mother, you have forgiven
my leaving, my marriage,
my degrees, foreign jobs
sixteen years.

*25 March 1989, Bedok*

The dislocated stanzas are graphically presented in a fluid pattern in order to imitate the fluidity of the dream of the persona, while they are framed by three regularly patterned stanzas to distinguish the dream of the persona from the reality. In this series of poems written as a memorial to of the deceased mother, Mother is always a silent object without a voice. This is the only time the poet gives a voice to her mother, but sadly, it is only through dream that her mother can regain her voice and in the dream, the mother and the persona can communicate again. Her sense of guilt is heightened as separation and alienation from the mother is not brought by death, but by her own emigration. "Sixteen years" is like a curse, and also an expression of her guilt. The poem reveals the regret of the persona due to her inability to spend more time with her mother. Indeed, the pair of mother and daughter have drifted apart sixteen years ago, long before the

death of the mother. The absent daughter is taken away from home by her ambition, by study, by job and by marriage.

The dislocated pattern of the poem helps to illustrate and visualize the image of the harbour which separates them; at the same time, it graphically symbolizes Victoria Harbour of Hong Kong where she was born. This wavy pattern symbolizes the gulf between the persona and her mother. They were first separated geographically by all the earthly and material matters and are now parted eternally by death. However, it is also the wave of the Hong Kong Harbour which melts into her subconscious that links her back to her home, and to her deceased mother in her dream. The harbour is the embodiment of her home and her family, it is a place where the young poet was nurtured. It is the wave that links her back to the memory of her mother, the letter which her mother wrote to her in Chinese. It is able to revive her Hong Kong-Chinese self which she has willfully forsaken during her sixteen years' stay in America and Singapore.[127]

[127] Even though Chinese is the most commonly used language in both Hong Kong and the Singapore Chinese community, the Chinese, both spoken and written, that they use are different. While Hong Kong people are speaking Cantonese and writing in traditional Chinese, Singaporean Chinese speak Mandarin (and sometimes dialects like Hokkien and Teochew) and write in simplified Chinese.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## *'Geeleegulu': Localisation, Globalisation, or Language Confusion?*

Hong Kong writers like Xu Xi are actively searching for a new definition of their city, and seeking to construct a more appropriate and psychologically viable identity for themselves and their fellow citizens of Hong Kong through their close examination of the postcolonial landscape and the history of the city in their works. Agnes Lam represents another totally different tendency of apolitical Hong Kong individuals who shift and mould their identity through their changes in personal experiences culturally and territorially. Both of these postcolonial writers have presented nostalgic and shifting views of the city's identity. There is an apparently irreconcilable tension between the subjective, psychological time and space of the city, and the relatively objective mainstream history and geography of the political world. A strong sense of inbetween-ness prevails in both writers' works: it seems that it is difficult for the city to be reconciled with both the colonial past, and the Chinese present which is the renewal of their detached cultural roots. Louise Ho, however, tries to explore the entrapment that Hong Kong people are experiencing from another angle. As a poet, she intensifies and magnifies the rootlessness and in between-ness of the place, through experimentation with language, the manipulation of words and voices. As a modernist, Ho moves on to further exploring the theme of isolation and hollowness of the modern concrete jungle. She fully brings out the double marginalization that this highly modernized ex-colony of Britain is facing.

## I. Language, Voice and Marginality

As has been said in Chapter One of this thesis, the classification imposed on literature written by non-native English writers, as well as the choice of writing in a non-local language, have put Anglophone Hong Kong writers such as Xu Xi and Louise Ho in a peripheral position. The development of the world economy as a global system, which is partially the aftermath of British and American systems of colonialism, has given a new dimension to English language. English has transmitted from the *old world* to the *new world* and at the same time transformed from a national language to an international language in various forms. As a result, a new category of English literature with its unique cultural characteristics has emerged. In the introduction to *The Stepmother Tongue*, John Skinner points out that regardless of terms such as "Commonwealth Literature", "Post-colonial Literature", "New Literature in English" or "World Literature in English" which are used to classify this type of literary writing, they all have some problematic aspects which in different ways marginalize the non-native English writers' literature and exclude it from the mainstream. These labels all "clearly [have] a hidden agenda, whether paternalistic or protectionist, with its hints of marginality or subordination."[128]

Indeed, not only do politically loaded labels like "Post-colonial" and "Commonwealth" marginalize these non-native English writers, even the term "Anglophone" tends to differentiate them from mainstream writing in the English language. Skinner recommends the term:

> There are other distinct advantages in using the term

[128] Skinner, John. *The Stepmother Tongue*, p.1.

> Anglophone (with its stress on the linguistic constant), rather than post-colonial (implying a monolithic and homogenizing reading of history) or even Commonwealth (often unfortunately suggesting little more than imperial nostalgia). Above all, it allows a new emphasis on emergence of the modern English language and the first colonial enterprises of the English themselves.[129]

In this way, literary works are classified and categorized linguistically into native English as a national language and new Englishes considered as modern languages. But, even though the problematic political labels are removed, the term "Anglophone" and the whole attempt to define this literary category is problematic in two main areas. Firstly, creative writings written in different varieties of English are still displaced from the mainstream "native English" classics like Shakespearean plays. This term therefore is still inherently marginalizing: it is an imposition of Western standardization on this literary category and it draws a defining line that polarises authenticity and eccentricity, the native and the adopted, nationality and transnationality. Secondly, such classification reveals the intensity of globalization. As Fredric Jameson notes, "globalization means the export and import of culture. This is, no doubt, a matter of business; yet it also presumably foretells the contact and interpenetration of national cultures at an intensity scarcely conceivable in older, slower epochs."[130] The non-native English writings are a transnational product of cross-cultural encounter. It is the relocation of an old culture in the new world and a readjustment of an old system in a new order. Benzi Zhang observes

[129] John Skinner, p.7
[130] Fredric Jameson, "Preface," in *The Cultures of Globalization*, (Durham, N.C : Duke University Press, 1998), p. 58

that there is "the pressure of global totality that has been represented by the spreading of Western standardisation."[131] However, by using the label Anglophone Literature, there is a strong tendency to overemphasize the imported English culture and undermine the existence of the local culture however insignificant and less dominant. It is a willful marginalisation of local cultures through the generalisation of them by a homogenous Anglo-American standard.

As Anglophone literature is under the effect of globalisation, inevitably localism plays an important role as a counterforce in this lingual and cultural relocation in the new world order. It is especially true in the case of Hong Kong. Anglophone Literature in Hong Kong is torn between the powerful force of global trends of cultural totality influenced by the West and the force of localism which is equally strong due to the long history and deep-rooted traditions of Chinese culture in the ethnic Chinese community. Anglophone writers in Hong Kong face the displacement of old and new, global and local and at the same time the disorientation of national and cultural identity by transnationality and internationality. According to John Skinner's classification, Anglophone Hong Kong Literature belongs to the category of *New Literatures in Old Worlds [our land/their language]* as Hong Kong was

> a stable and long-established local society [before being] disrupted by Anglo-Saxon imperial enterprises...[where] every writer ... should possess one or more indigenous language besides English in which he or she could have written. Some actually did or now do so, but most of them use "their"

[131] Benzi Zhang, "Re-Siting the Global/Re-Sighting the Local", in *Sights of Contestation: localism, globalism and cultural production in Asia Pacific*, Kwok Kan Tam, Terry Yip and Wimal Dissannayake (eds.), 35-56 (36).

> language (English) to produce the *New Literature* which arouses such widespread interest today. Whether adopted or rejected, then, English may have been quite seriously considered as a kind of stepmother tongue.[132]

But as compared with writers in the same group such as Southeast Asian writers and even Indian writers, the rejection and resistance that Hong Kong writers are facing in using *their language* in producing *New Literature* is especially strong and prevailing. This is mainly due to the fact that Hong Kong has been continuously under the influence of and has now become part of the Chinese cultural paradigm which is dominant and flourishing.

As a result, the position of Anglophone Hong Kong writers like Louise Ho is inherently marginalized. The term Anglophone Hong Kong Literature may suggest some hint of the tension, paradox and incompatibility between the new literature and the old world, the transnational language and the local, if not national, Chinese culture. While Louise Ho's poems are marginalized from mainstream Anglo-American Old Literature, hers as well as her fellow Anglophone writers' works are excluded from the mainstream of local Hong Kong Literature. This literary category comes into being as the juxtaposition of the double rejections and marginalization at the boundaries by two major streams of literature. In the case of Louise Ho, her English tongue will forever be an adopted tongue while her English poetry like a Chinese orphan adopted by an English speaking stepmother, who will always look displaced and misplaced both

[132] John Skinner, *The Stepmother Tongue*, pp.15-24, in which the author categorizes Anglophone writings in four major types: New Literature in Old Worlds [our land/their language], New Literatures in New Worlds [their land/their language], Old Literature in New Worlds [their land/our language] and lastly Old Literatures in Old Worlds [our land/our language].

in the context of Cantonese speaking Hong Kong and in the Anglo-American literary sphere.

## II. I Speak Therefore I Am Not

Even though both Louise Ho and Xu Xi have chosen to position themselves as English writers of Hong Kong, the identities that they try to assert are very different. As has been said in Chapters Two and Three, the route which Xu Xi has followed in developing her writing career is exactly the opposite to that of Louise Ho. The former has gone through less internal struggle in deciding on her medium of writing and experienced less complication in the process of establishing herself as an Anglophone Hong Kong writer. In fact, Xu Xi used the attraction of a Hong Kong writer's identity mainly to appeal to her American readership when she first began her writing career. It was not until she gained fame as an international "Anglophone Hong Kong writer" that she actually started to cultivate the literary culture of Hong Kong. By contrast, Louise Ho has always been conscious of "speaking from Hong Kong" and at the same time felt perplexity in representing her city:

> At a literary conference held in Downing College, Cambridge in 1999, Salman Rushdie held forth expansively on cosmopolitanism, speaking very much as a cosmopolitan himself. Following on from him spoke a well-respected Welsh poet who claimed "the local" versus "the global" as his fortified ground, saying, "I am very conscious of being aboriginal." Being Welsh, he would be so privileged! I felt very envious of his staunch avowal of his sense of belonging. Later on, I gave a mini-reading of my work and I was conscious of speaking from Hong

> Kong; but, although I was sent there by the British Council as a Hong Kong delegate, I felt I could only represent my puny self. [133]

Louise Ho finds the gap between private self and public self. her personal interest and general concerns, as well as between her linguistic self and political identity, widened, and her determination shaken as a result adopting an English voice in a Cantonese context. She wrote:

> Those of us writing in the English language in Hong Kong would know the feeling of isolation, perhaps of functioning in a void. There is no English-language literary community from which to draw some kind of affinity or against which to react. There is insufficient writing in English here for a critical mass to have formed. The literary traditions that do exist in Hong Kong are, obviously, those of the Chinese language. For us, it is a case of *chacun pour soi*, in that we each carry a culturally different baggage from the start; and presumably, we each work according to some implied tradition and critical standard of one's own adherence.[134]

She is torn between her role as a writer and the identity of being a Hongkonger. She has to juggle her roles in order to represent Hong Kong and to speak for herself. All the problems and complications which threaten her identity are reflected in Ho's works, and they sometimes produce sarcasm and skepticism.

It is not difficult for readers to detect from the poems that Louise Ho's notion of language is greatly influenced by modernist writers. Language in the modern world no longer offers a voice to speakers which

---

[133] Louise Ho, "Foreword" in *City Voices: Hong Kong Writing in English 1945 to the Present* (ed.) Xu Xi & Mike Ingham, xiii-ix.
[134] Ibid.

straightforwardly helps them assert their identity. Language does not serve its primary function of communication, and has lost its aesthetic appeal and elegance. Louise Ho integrates modernist thinking into her view of the present situation of her city. Paul de Man claims in an essay in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* that:

> [v]oice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, *prosopon poein*, to confer a make or a face (prosopon). *Prosopopeia* is the trope of autobiography, by which one's name …is made as intelligible and memorable as a face.[135]

If language is the voice and the identity of a place, what types of face or identity is Hong Kong able to obtain from her multi-lingual voices? The city seems to fail to have a unique language which can represent it. Ho's language often mocks the incapacity for beauty and communication in modern languages. At the same time she comments on the fact that, regardless of the wide range of variety of languages to which Hong Kong is exposed, none of them can give a voice, an identity to the city.

The city needs a language which can offer it a voice; Cantonese, its local dialect, seems to be the choice. In the poem "Flags and flowers", Louise Ho has indeed verbalized the yearning of the people to have their own unique and independent voice in a very concrete manner of preserving their own native dialect. The lines "Change our flag as you must/But let us keep our speech" (line 17-8) plainly yet powerfully reveal their eagerness

[135] Paul de Man. "Autobiography as De-Facement" in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1984. 67-81. (76).

to preserve their "speech" even though they lack the power and sovereignty to determine and decide their own flag, i.e., their political identity. To them, their "speech", their Cantonese dialect is not a mere language of communication. It is pregnant with the essence and spirit of the place. The poet, with the use of listing, forcefully presents in the last part of the poem the importance of this language to the identity of the decolonizing territory. The dialect is:

> Our local voices
> Our nine tones
> Our complex homophones
> Our own configurations of meaning
> Our own polite formalities
> Our resonances from the Hans of old ("Flags and flowers").

The preservation of Cantonese as the official language carries a significant meaning to its identity especially on the eve of decolonization. The repeated and emphasizing use of "our" suggests that this language forms the collective identity of Hongkongers. As Djebar claims "identity is not made up only of paper or blood but also of *language*,"[136] Cantonese, the language, is their "local voice", conferring a collective local identity that differentiates them from the sovereign powers, both Britain and China. It gives the people the unique identity that neither "paper", the nationality nor the "blood", their Chinese race, can offer them. It is central to their daily life, their cultural identity, their social norms and most importantly, preserves "resonances from the Hans of old", their link to their past, their history and their ancestral land.[137]

---

[136] Djebar, Assia. "Writing in the Language of the Other" in *The Translingual Imagination.* Ed. Steven G. Kellman. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000. p.19-27

[137] It is believed that Cantonese is the only modern Chinese dialect which is evolved from and has a strong resemblance to ancient Chinese in terms of tones and pronunciations.

But, even though Cantonese offers a collective voice to the local people of Hong Kong, the voice is so linguistically distinctive that it is incompatible with and creates disharmony with the expectation of the national political audience. The tension between "you", the "flag" and "we", "our speech" is very obvious in "Flags and flowers". We find that Louise Ho presents sovereign China and decolonizing Hong Kong as respectively "you" and "we", a binary if not opposed pair. It is an unconventional and unorthodox depiction, especially when Hong Kong is on the eve of decolonization and reunion with China. The way that Hongkongers strive to preserve their sense of locality and collective cultural identity conflicts with the political identity that is imposed on them. The nostalgia and pride of Hongkongers towards their dialect reflects their reluctance to conform to mainland Chinese culture and ethnicity and take up the official Chinese language Mandarin, although, politically, they have no choice but to accept the change of their flag and Chinese sovereignty.

Not only is the identity that Cantonese provides problematic, the voice that it provides is also partially inaudible and incommunicative. In the poem "Meeting", Louise Ho stresses the inaccessibility and perceived difficulty of Cantonese. The short narrative poem about the encounter of the persona with a man from Mainland China stresses the irony of the non-communication between Chinese from the two places: "We tried to talk/But he spoke a different dialect/He was from the Mainland" (line 4-6). The short, fragmented run-on lines show the struggle of the two people in trying to communicate. Supposedly, language provides voices and facilitates communication. Cantonese has indeed given Hong Kong its unique voice

and identity. Ironically however, language can also be a force of segregation and alienation. Through the narrative of the short encounter of the two people, the poet subtly suggests that there is an invisible gap between the two places, and how it is widened due to the difference in language. China and Hong Kong, while having the same ancestral culture, become alienated through the variance of language. Indeed, the difference in language can also imply the difference in mentality, ideology and political system. The difference in the political systems, capitalism and socialism, has resulted in the variance in their language, in the sense of political and social discourses. The difference in their political languages makes it even more difficult to communicate than that of the actual languages. Since the difference of mentality and culture goes with the difference in dialect, as "Flags and flowers" suggests, a big obstacle hinders the reunion. On one hand, the Cantonese speaking persona is unable to understand his fellow people from the same race and fails to connect himself with his sovereign homeland; his voice is incomprehensible to the man from Mainland China too. The Cantonese voice of Hong Kong seems unable to be heard, or to link the place to its Mandarin-speaking sovereign, China.

Furthermore, the lack of decency of Cantonese makes it less suitable to be chosen to represent the decolonizing territory. Putting aside the political reason, Louise Ho still holds a far from positive opinion towards the Cantonese voice of Hong Kong. The poem "Well-Spoken Cantonese", seemingly praising Cantonese elegance, is merely another sarcasm of the poet. Instead of pinpointing the vulgarity of the language, the poet tactfully praises the elegance of the language which is "so rare anywhere/But rarest

of all, here" (line 6-7). The emphasis of the rareness of the beauty and grace of the language undermines the apparent compliment to it in the title. and successfully creates an irony in the situation. At the same time, the lengthy, repetitive and redundant praise, "How praise the beauties of a gracious man/Except that they are the graces of a beautiful man?" (line 1-2), reveals the dryness and ineffectiveness of the language. It lacks the vocabulary to express and describe, and has to repeat itself. Surely, to the poet, such a poor and dry language is never a desirable choice to represent oneself and their city.

In view of the estrangement of and the inability to relate to Mandarin, English seems to be the last resort left to Hong Kong and its people. But unfortunately, the colonial language seems to be restricted to the elites, and fails to reach and permeate to the general public. "Jamming" is Louise Ho's vivid representation of this social phenomenon. The eccentric structure and graphical deviation of the poem creates a visualized image of the tension between the colonial language and that of the Chinese ethnic community within the decolonizing city. The whole poem is structured with alternate stanzas of English and Cantonese, using the colloquial onomatopoeic phrase "geeleegulu". This structure seems to suggest and imitate the futility of the attempt to produce interaction and communication between English language and culture and that of the Chinese in the context of Hong Kong. Unfortunately, as in the title of the poem, the two cultures stall together without proper communication. "Macbeth", representing English culture, "Churchill", representing English politics and ideology, and even English the language itself, are not transmissible and communicable to a members of the local culture. There may be an attempt amongst the intellectuals to

integrate the two languages and cultures: "Have you ever tried merging/The time-stressed with the syllable-stressed within one discourse" ("Jamming"). But the voice is too feeble as it is too high-sounding for the comprehension of the general public. Thus, English language, the knowledge and the culture remain "geeleegulu", a meaningless utterance, to the mass public of Hong Kong. Or, the local reply to the English speaker, judged by native English standards of proficiency, is again "geeleegulu", a language confusion. As the structure of the poem shows, the two languages remain two forces which oppose one another but are never able to integrate, merge and intercommunicate; the gap between them remains.[138]

Ho points out, moreover, that even as an intellectual, she encounters difficulties through using English. English, the international language and the colonial language of Hong Kong, is not as accessible as it seems to be. In her poem "Writing is Bleak" she reveals the marginality that this colonial language has brought to her. In the lines "Writing in this language in this place/Is doubly bleak" the poet highlights for her audience the relationship between language's meaning and accessibility, and its place. The persona reveals her difficulty as a writer in encountering the multiple displacements which writing imposes. She is marginalized since she, as an ethnic Chinese, has to make her voice heard, by writing in English. Yet, she is doubly marginalized as her English voice is out of place in the Cantonese speaking territory of Hong Kong. In the first stanza of the poem, Louise Ho compares herself with Yeats and Joyce, who shared a similar experience of

---

[138] Please refer to Appendix Three for the further discussion of the complexity of language identity of Hong Kong.

colonization to express her poetic dilemma and worries about her poetic integrity. However, the difference is that to these Irish writers, this colonial experience is inspirational, while the cultural exile is empowering. It stimulated them to start the Irish Literary Revival which was initiated by Yeats and carried on by Joyce. Yeats devoted his literary career to promoting the appreciation of traditional Irish literature and culture as distinct from English ones from a new perspective and to sought to "find work for Irish hands in the making of beautiful things."[139] Joyce demonstrates through the richness of his work that his self-imposed exile was a source of inspiration and creativity. He revives the cultural identity of Ireland which is transcendental from the physical boundary to spirituality in his literary work by writing about Dublin as an expatriate writer who never returned to his homeland. Through this Irish people were once again reconnected to their ancestral culture and they could rebuild their ethnic and cultural identity. Ethnicity/ ethnic ties, as Manning Nash claims are:

> Primordial ties [which] lie at the core of the person. They form the basic identity, and they are the markers of humanity that come to the person at the earliest periods of socialization, before there is a filter of rejection and acceptance. Primordial ties are thus the social expression, the psychological basis of identity, selfhood, and of others who are like the self, and yet others who are different from self.[140]

Though the idea of ethnicity seems to encourage a racial group to imagine its cultural and psychological difference so as to form a bond within the

[139] "Irish Genius': The Yeats Family and The Cuala Press". The University of Dublin, Trinity College, 12 February 2004. Retrieved on 2 June 2007.
[140] Manning Nash. *The Caldron of Ethnicity in the Modern World.* p.4.

group, in the case of Louise Ho, it is exactly her ethnicity which gives her a psychological burden and prevents her from obtaining a new identity of her own. She expresses her frustration as she wonders whether: "to fret/Over the right word/Or the heart/In the right place" in order to make her voice heard by the local audience, but finally "shuffles from kitchen to loo/ biting [her] nails not knowing what to do."

She is expressing her frustration, like the modernist poets she quoted, for being unable to express herself in her own language and her real voice to her people. At the same time, she is troubled by language that has displaced her, she feels out of place when she is using the colonial language. She finds that language loses its power with this misplacement, and she fails to communicate with her audience and her fellow Hongkongers. Nevertheless, the poet takes up a more optimistic view in the second half of the poem, in which she seeks consolation from Romantic values. Like the west wind in Shelley's ode, Nature, "the North wind", is a soothing agent which comforts her, tells her "not to fret/Over the right word/Or the heart/In the right place". Ho seems to be withdrawing from her ambition to be a Hong Kong Yeats who would fight for a national culture's identity in poems and turns to Romantic notions of writing as a means of aesthetic self-expression.

Lacking any language which can truly represent the city, Hong Kong loses its own voice. Without a properly representative language which links it to a consolidated, rich and vigorous culture, Hong Kong is a place without voice, without culture and without roots. More than once Louise Ho criticizes the dryness and hollowness of the city. In complaining of the bleakness of writing in English in Hong Kong in "Writing is Bleak", Ho is

actually complaining about Hongkongers' inability to appreciate literature. In "Summer at Warwick", she describes the city as no more than a piece of wasteland: "in voiceless Hong Kong/we dry up from year to year/until we shrivel into dust". Ho shares certain views of modernist poets like T.S. Eliot concerning the modern world. In her eyes, the highly modernized Hong Kong is like the piece of wasteland in Eliot's poem, which is disconnected from any ancient civilization and is drying up. It is possible to trace some resemblances between Louise Ho's arrangement of poems in describing Hong Kong and Eliot's *The Waste Land.* Even though the city seems to be vivid and vibrant, as in "Jamming", full of noise and sound, they are merely fragments of incomprehensible conversations just like those fragments of incommunicative speeches in "A Game of Chess" in *The Waste Land.* The effort made by the city to communicate and acquire a voice ends up in miscommunication. The city is isolated and sealed off from communication. Much as in "What the Thunder Said", the last section of *The Waste Land,* Louise Ho presents a similar pessimistic view of the future of decolonizing Hong Kong. Because of the impossibility of integrating different voices and forming an audible unique voice belonging to it, the various voices that have mingled in the city will scatter apart and the city will end up voiceless. With no voice, and no shared identity, individuals in the city become like loose sand and dust in a piece of drying and dying wasteland. They have no power of unity until "the deluge come[s]". Ho ends her poem with the line "when will the deluge come", echoing the ending of *The Waste Land.* There is no hope for the city until there is rain; there is no means to hold the loose, scattered, diverse, multicultural-lingual Hong Kong society together. Sadly, the rain is yet to

come. Even worse, water, or rain, the source of life, fertility and continuity for Eliot, is seen by Louise Ho more as a powerfully destructive force coming in the form of deluge. The city is thus doomed.

To further dramatize the frustration and disappointment in her search for linguistic identity, Louise Ho gives this ending to "Jamming", a poem visualizing the linguistic multiplicities of the city:

> Die speech die language
> Words have lost their currency
> The world is too old and
> There is nothing more to say

This follows the poem's fruitless attempt to solve the incommunicable conflict and oppositions of the English and Cantonese languages and cultures.

## III. Creating a Lingual/ Poetic Replica of Ireland's Nationalism?

Undoubtedly Louise Ho has a strong affinity with and admiration for the Irish modernist poet W.B. Yeats. We find that she makes reference and pays tributes to Yeats in a number of her poems. Observant readers will notice the similarities between Yeats's and Louise Ho's historical heritage and cultural background: both poets have a strong connection to and problematic relationship with English culture, and their homelands both confront a crucial moment of historic change and colonial dominance as British rule approaches its end. But while Yeats's influence on Louise Ho's work is evident, it is necessary to ask how far this influence goes. Is Louise Ho attracted by Yeats's notions of cultural nationalism and artistic freedom, and by the style and aesthetics of Yeats's poems, or is she fascinated by the general nationalistic revolutionary sentiments prevailing in Yeats's time? If

we are to give the poet's works a fair valuation, it is necessary to examine Ho's relation to Yeats closely.

As has been said, Louise Ho makes direct reference to Yeats and his works in a number of her poems. One of the most evident and explicit examples is "After Yeats", in which she openly pays her tributes to the Nobel Laureate:

> I saw her gliding down the corridor,
> Her chin tilted at a small angel,
> Her eyes in a distant gaze
> I had thought that face
> A fitting subject for any fine brush.
>
> Memory then yields another head,
> With chin slightly tilted,
> A face flanked by yellow braids,
> Her eyes held in the distance.
> Botticelli's mistress, sister
> Of Amerigo Vespuci,
> (The latter gave one country its name),
> Venus, Primavera, Virgin Mary and others,
> To adorn a wall or a celling,
> In those vibrant days of bright clarity.
>
> I know her now; and though of
> Polish-German stock, an American.
> Is she her parents' child
> Or Venus's double?
> Which of her forms has shown her substance right?
> Gyres run on.
> But that face, that face
> Will always be Botticellean. ("After Yeats")

The poem echoes with Yeats's treatment of Maud Gonne as poetic muse and subject, and also incorporates features of Yeats's style, aesthetic judgment and notion of beauty. In lines, "Memory then yields another

head,/ With chin slightly tilted,/ A face flanked by yellow braids,/ Her eyes held in the distance", Louise Ho recalls Yeats's way of describing Maud Gonne. By comparing her subject's beauty to that of goddess-like Gonne, Louise Ho treats Yeats's goddess of beauty as the archetype of beauty and standard of aesthetics. Louise Ho also celebrates her beauty in a similar way to Yeats. Like Yeats, Ho makes allusion to myths, legends and the Bible in order to extend her definition of beauty beyond mere physical appearance. Beauty here is mythologized and deified. It is that of Venus and the Spring in Botticelli's paintings. Beauty here has an aura of chivalric romance, and includes personal nobility. It is a source of wisdom, and an unattainable subject of love. Here beauty, like that of the subjects of Botticelli's paintings, can transcend the boundary of perishable physical bodies and exist independently and immortally as presented in art. It is Venus and Virgin Mary; it is a religion and a faith.

As well as this explicit homage to Yeats, we find traces of Yeats's style and ideas in the themes and language in other poems by Ho. We have already discussed Yeats' influence on Louise Ho's style in the earlier section, however, apart from Yeats' aestheticism, his political viewpoints also have a great impact on the Hong Kong poet's search for her Hong Kong identity on the eve of the major political change. One of the most noticeable similarities is their sensitivity to political and historical events and their consciousness of time. The poems "Hong Kong Riot 1967", "Remembering June 4 1989" and "A Good Year" bear a strong resemblance to Yeats's political poems, especially "September 1913", "Easter 1916" and "Second Coming". The use of dates in the titles of Yeats's poems serves the purpose of commemorating historical events and

the revolutionary movement in Ireland and reveals his awareness that Ireland is in a time of change and transformation. In "Easter 1916" Yeats is very conscious of and even anxious concerning the fact that Ireland is "changing" and "transforming utterly" with the political events cited in his poems. In "Second Coming" the "rough beast" to come is worryingly unknown:

> The darkness drops again; but now I know
> The twenty centuries of stony sleep
> Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? ("The Second Coming")[141]

For Louise Ho and her fellow Hongkongers, the approaching events are a sensitive and alarming issue. The poet, just like everyone in Hong Kong, is well-aware of the date when the transformation of Hong Kong will take place, 1997. While Yeats awaits, if not necessarily welcoming, a change that may take place at any time, Louise Ho would like to resist the approach of this day. The year is like an omen which haunts everyone so much that it has become the metonym of change. The poet is conscious of the passage of time, and anxious that the time before she faces the change is getting shorter. 1997 is not only the deadline for Britain to relinquish its colonial rule of Hong Kong, but also potentially the "dead line" for the territory itself:

> Deadly dead lines kill
> They freeze the future
> Blocking free passage for the present ("A Good Year")

The poet seems not to hold a positive opinion of the change that 1997 will bring as this transformation will lead Hong Kong to the rule of Communist

[141] W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming".

China, a future "frozen" in the mind that she cannot envisage and be certain about. Her concern and reservations about the future of Hong Kong are clear in the poems "Hong Kong Riots, 1967 I", "Hong Kong Riots, 1967 II" and "Remembering 4th June, 1989". These dates are reminders of what is fresh and painful in the experience of the few immediate contacts between Hong Kong and Communist China. And they became a psychological obstacle for Louise Ho and many of the Hongkongers in accepting the political change that 1997 would bring to their city.

Yeats remains relatively uninvolved with and skeptical towards political issues in his poems even though he is highly conscious of and concerned about the political changes in his country. In the poems "No Second Troy" and "September 1913", the vast use of mythical allusion and the treatment of Maud Gonne as an analogue for Helen of Troy reveal not only Yeats's obsession with Gonne's beauty but also his skeptical political viewpoint. Maud Gonne in Yeats's creative career, becomes an image for the idealized political movement which "filled my days/ with misery", has "taught to ignorant men most violent ways,/or hurled the little streets upon the great" ("No Second Troy"), and at the same time like "some woman's yellow hair/ has maddened every mother's son" ("September 1931"). On one hand, Yeats idealizes his political beliefs, creating an analogy between romantic nationalism and his beloved Maud Gonne; but on the other hand, he is skeptical concerning this political ideal's practicability and the actions taken by his contemporary revolutionaries. As he once admits, he is "at war with his time", and resistant to journalistic and critical simplicity. This emerges in his further comparison of idealized romantic nationalism with aging, dying O'Leary. Though the ideal is as beautiful, sexually alluring,

heroic and romantic as Gonne, not only is it unobtainable but it is also "dead and gone/...with O'Leary in the grave". While these two earlier poems reveal the poet's conviction of the inapplicability of his idealized romantic nationalist belief to contemporary Ireland, the other two poems reflect the complicated mixture of feelings of the poet towards revolutionaries and their political movements. Although the poet expresses his temporary sympathy towards the revolutionaries immediately after the 1916 Rising, his attitude towards them reminds skeptical: "a terrible beauty is born" ("Easter 1916"). Nor are Louise Ho's poems "Hong Kong Riots, 1967 I & II" simply commemoration of the historical event. She adopts Yeats's skepticism in her attitude towards politics. As a matter of fact, skepticism in Louise Ho develops into an emotional detachment not only from the governments and politics but also from a sense of the place. The dryness of the tone and the short, fragmented lines not only mimic the destructiveness of the mobs and their bombs, but also reveals the lack of feeling, indifference and skepticism of the poet towards the event:

> At five this morning
> The curfew lifted.
> Receding, it revealed
> Shapes that became people
> Moving among yesterday's debris.
> Stones, more so than words,
> Are meaningless,
> Out of context. ("Hong Kong Riots, 1967 I")

The calmness of the tone that the poet has adopted in describing the scene after the riots reveals that she remains undisturbed by the violent event. She takes the side of neither the colonial government nor the communist mobs, as the poem is depicted from none of their perspectives. However, what is

surprising is that, as a member of the community, she seems to be unmoved by this riot which has brought so much destruction to her city and so much loss of life to the innocent people. She summarizes the bombs, the strikes, the killings and the demonstrations with one single word, "debris". The riots, as described in "Hong Kong Riots, 1967 II": "Many months/ And nothing broke through/ the marching/ the chanting/ the burning/ the bombs", were poorly organized. The series of violent acts of "marching", "chanting", "burning" and "bombs", illustrated by the fragmented and loosed structure of the poem, lacks coordination. They are just spontaneous, ruthless acts that lack a proper philosophy to support them and shared faith amongst the demonstrators. Hence, "Stones [the evidence of the riots], more so than words/ Are meaningless, /Out of context". The poet skeptically views the whole event as meaningless and the destructions caused by the rebels are mere destructions without making any contributions or conveying any messages. The series of riots in Hong Kong, unlike the nationalist movement in Ireland which has brought sorrow, anguish and shock to the poet and revived sense of belonging and unity amongst the Irish people through the martyrdom of a few, has brought nothing but absurdity to the city. It is never a fulfilling experience. In fact, the poet has further impregnated her disapproval; as mentioned earlier, the event is one of the psychic hindrances of Hong Kong people towards the reunion with their motherland.

With skepticism and disapproval towards the Irish political nationalist movement, Yeats has devoted himself to looking for an alternative to launch his ideal form of nationalism. Likewise, Louise Ho seems to be looking for a method to define Hong Kong identity apart from political

means. Yeats, indeed, is famous for his project of Irish cultural nationalism. He has determined not simply to focus on the political independence of Ireland. He is chasing the roots and looking for the lost values of Ireland from the ancient culture. Hence, he has devoted himself to the project of collecting and rewriting Irish myths and fables. Yeats has reconstructed, transformed and revived the ancient Irish myths and Irish hero Cuchulain in his poems and in his plays. In time, Cuchulain, the mythical hero of Ireland has become Yeats's altergo and ambition, and even the freedom fighter and nationalist hero in the poetic world and the cultural nationalist movement. Similarly, Ho seems to be attempting to look for a link that connects Hong Kong to its ancient culture. More than once, she tries to highlight the special qualities of the "nine tones", the "complex homophones" and the "resonance from the Hans of old" of Cantonese which are inherited from ancient Chinese language. For the poet, the Cantonese dialect is not simply a gesture of resistance to conform to Chinese cultural identity as discussed in the previous section. Through the connection to the past, the vigorous ancient culture and civilization, Ho wants to find a root for Hong Kong through which the city can develop its pride, its identity and sense of unity. With such a powerful claim of the strong link of the Cantonese dialect to the representative ancestral cultural root in the poem, readers are likely to expect the recurrence of a similar theme and image in other poems. Unfortunately, neither is the poet personally involved in this linguistic project nor has she fully developed this lingual motif in her poems. Even though Ho has made some attempts to explore the notion further in some of her poems like "Well Spoken Cantonese", the image and the idea of language remain feeble. As a result,

the cultural project of "national" identity of Hong Kong people is underdeveloped in Ho's works.

Nonetheless, it is not fair to compare Louise Ho with W.B. Yeats and to impose a harsh judgment on the modern Hong Kong poet simply because of the discovery of some traces of her admiration and impressions of Yeats and his works. Although there are references to Yeats, quotations of his lines, allusion to his ideas and mimicking of his style and form in some of Louise Ho's works, Louise Ho is not a blind follower of Yeats nor is she intending to be Yeats's successor. It may even be wrong to try to pursue evidence of Yeats's influence on Louise Ho. It is possible to believe that Louise Ho is consciously and intentionally mimicking and alluding to Yeats' works with the purpose of responding to and reconstructing Yeats's ideas in her own poems. As mentioned earlier, Louise Ho has shared skeptical views in politics in the writing of her political poems like "Hong Kong Riots, 1967 I & II". As a matter of fact, her indifference and detached feelings remain even after the June-Fourth Incident although there is a moment of sympathy towards the revolutionaries due to the shock created by the event. Ho has declared clearly in the beginning of her poem that:

> Yes, I remember Marvell, Dryden,
> Yeats, men who had taken up the pen
> While others the sword
> To record the events of the sword
> That would have vanished
> Were it not for the words
> That shaped them and kept them. ("Remembering 4th June, 1989", ln 1-7)

She is inspired by Yeats, and John Dryden and Andrew Marvell's methods of expressing their opinions towards politics in their poems. She is

espousing the same ambition and making an attempt to do the same by responding to the June-Fourth Incident in a poetic way. In fact, she is making an intertextual link to Yeats's "Easter 1916" and echoing Yeats's shock and complex feelings towards the changes that the revolutionaries brought to Ireland, and in her case, the university students in China, in the poem. The lines:

> Then, this compact commercial enclave,
> First time ever, rose up as one.
> Before we went our separate ways again,
> We thought as one,
> We spoke as one,
> We too have changed, if "not utterly"
> And something beautiful was born

are obviously an echo of Yeats' motif of "all changed, changed utterly:/ A terrible beauty is born" in his poem. However, Ho is not simply trying to imitate Yeats's act of writing, mimicking Yeats's style or alluding to Yeats's sentiments in her poem. What follows the echoes is her answer, her response to Yeats and to the historical events which are on one hand so similar, but on the other hand so different.

> They say, but how shall you and I
> Name them, one by one?
> There were so many,
> Crushed, shot, taken, all overwhelmed,
> Cut down without a finished thought or cry.

These lines seem to be responding to Yeats's attempt to commemorate the martyrs of nationalist movement by naming them one by one in his poem. In Ho's opinion, the student movement in 1989 was to a large extent a collective protest of the students against the government instead of the romantic nationalist movement bringing personal pride and glory to individuals which Yeats fancies. The lines are also suggesting the huge

number of martyrs makes it impossible to remember and record the names of each individual. Nevertheless, the tone of detachment, which coincides with the gradually intensifying detached mood of the latter part of the poem, is pregnant in these lines. Ho, unlike Yeats who is personally connected to MacBride and many of the other revolutionaries, reports the event from an outsider and observer's point of view, does not feel any connection towards the death of the students. Neither does she know the names nor do the names of individual students carry any special meaning or striking feelings for her.

This distant feeling and sense of alienation from the event gets stronger towards the end of the poem. Instead of changing because of the uprising, Ho is responding to Yeats's poem that "we ...have changed". The change has definitely taken place but such transformation is transient and momentary. Unlike what Yeats believes that 1916 Rising in Ireland has changed utterly the political situation of the country and at the same time the mind of the people: the event provides them with a shared experience and collective identity and sentiments towards their county, Louise Ho's view of the effect of the students' movement in 1989 is not all positive. Although Hongkongers were touched by the Chinese students and "rose up as one" as Chinese, they "went [their] separate ways again". Their identification with China is temporary and transient:

> Then, this compact commercial enclave,
> First time ever, rose up as one.
> Before we went our separate ways again,
> We thought as one,
> We spoke as one,
> We too have changed, if "not utterly"
> And something beautiful was born.

The June-Fourth Incident began with the death of Secretary General Hu Yaobang of the Chinese Communist Party in May that year and the university students of the capital spontaneously organized some mass gatherings to mourn and lament for the death of the upright, respected Party leader. The mass mourning soon turned into the students' demonstration against corruption and demand for democracy and political reform of the government. The politically indifferent Hongkongers were moved by the act of the students. For the first time, they rose up, went out to the streets voluntarily and spontaneously to demonstrate and to support the students in China. These were among the first large scale demonstrations in the history of Hong Kong. These demonstrations, though spontaneous in their nature, were well-organized, well-disciplined and peaceful. They revived most Hongkongers' Chinese nationalist feelings and a sense of belonging towards the city and even towards China. Skeptical as Louise Ho is, she has to admit that the students' demonstration in China in 1989 is like a spell cast on the rootless colony and it has successfully created some magical effect on "this compact commercial enclave" which is unfeeling and values only money and material prosperity. Hong Kong and its people, bewitched by the spell, have the sense of unity growing magically within them and scattered individuals miraculously transform into one unit; and what is more important, for the first time, Hong Kong seems to have emerged and united with China: speak and think "as one". All these, however, is not lasting. The poet has added a sad, sarcastic but rather accurate footnote to the temporary and rare transformation of Hong Kong, that when it is over "we went our separate ways again". After that, the relationship between Hong Kong and its "Motherland" regresses back

to what it is like in the old time.

The suppression of the students and demonstrators on 4th June 1989 was unable to undo the transformation in the mentality and sentiments of Hongkongers, but definitely the violence has revoked the magic spell of nationalist feelings from Hong Kong. The incident brought a shock, from which they needed some time to recover, to many of the Hongkongers; at the same time, it has quickly cooled down many of their passions and wakened them to their blind patriotism during the period prior to the suppression of the students' demonstration. Like the sense of belonging and the Chinese nationalist feeling that the students' demonstration brought them, the unexpected political change has once again shaken their sense of identity. But one thing is certain is that the incident has reaffirmed the fear of communist rule of many Hongkongers. As Louise Ho has written in her poem, "We too have changed, if 'not utterly'/And something beautiful was born". Though the process of spiritual union with China is interrupted by the undesirable event, the experience has successfully brought Hongkongers "something beautiful", that is, their self-awakening and self-understanding. The whole event has revived their national pride, their unity and their urge for an independent identity. Being ethnically Chinese, Hongkongers are no longer satisfied with being the submissive subjects of the colonial rule and this may be an appropriate preparation for the handover in 1997:

> As we near the end of an era
> We have at last
> Become ourselves

However, the effect is not favorable to Communist China. Once the Hongkongers "have at last become themselves", they are clear about what

they want and communist rule is the last thing they want to see in Hong Kong. The twist in the second half the stanza reveals the desire of the poet to be detached from China. From the former unity and spiritual union in the previous stanza, the attitude of the poet towards China has changed abruptly. With the abruptness, the effort of separating from China is obvious. The strong sense of alienation, the gap of between and otherness, remains as strong as ever. The once inclusive "we" of both China and Hong Kong dissolves and the poet divorces Hong Kong from the spiritual union with China. Once again Hong Kong further detaches itself from China as its mere neighbour and "the catalyst/was our neighbour's blood" ("Remembering 4th June, 1989"). Ho, representing many of her fellow Hongkongers, has been slightly disturbed but not really troubled by the incident.

While Yeats's views towards his own country and the revolutionary movement are unique and consistent, Louise Ho has a diverging view towards the event. "Easter 1916" consists of only one voice throughout the whole poem. The poet is expressing his personal lament and appreciation towards the Rising and the sacrifice made by the martyrs. He focuses on adopting his own point of view in reviewing that political movement. Yet, more like Marvell than Yeats, there seems to be some difficulty in stabilizing the perspective in Louise Ho's poem. The inconsistency is mainly due to the fluid, complicated perspectives that the poet is using. Like Yeats, Louise Ho starts her poem with her personal "I" point of view. She is expressing her personal ambition to follow Yeats's example in composing her laments into a poem. However, putting aside her poetic passion, the reactions of the poet towards the event are just the same as her

fellow Hongkongers' and she is in fact representing their ideas in her poem. As mentioned above, the political movement brings a moment of unity amongst people in Hong Kong and thus, Ho's "I" perspective expands and elevates to "we", the collective perspective and apathy of the majority of Hong Kong people towards the demonstrators and their neighbours. However, the poet never aims to romanticize the political movement or mythologize the transformation of the Hongkongers as Yeats does; she adds in some sarcastic and oppositional opinions as the anticlimax that de-romanticizes the illusion of the transient unity:

> But think, my friend, think: China never
> Promised a tea party, or cakes
> For the masses. It is we,
> Who, riding on the crest of a long hope,
> Became euphoric, and forgot
> The rock bottom of a totalitarian state. ("Remembering 4th June, 1989")

The sarcasm is surely an extension of the poet's skeptical style. It also reveals the internal conflict of persona. She is torn between her warmest emotions towards heroic martyrdom of her fellow Chinese in Mainland China and her coldest judgement of the state of affairs that China is a communist country. Moreover, as Ho is trying to represent her fellow Hongkongers' opinions, this sarcasm is another voice of the diverse public opinions that counteract the seemingly collective voice. Indeed, the multiple voices in the poem illustrate the reality of Hong Kong society. Like the structure and the voices in the poems, Hong Kong people lack a shared goal and belief. Their voices collide and compete, there is the lack of a sentiment to hold them together and they are scattered apart. By imitating "Easter 1916", Louise Ho is not only attempting to create her

poem as a parody of Yeats's; at the same time, she is presenting Hong Kong, and its reaction to June-Fourth Incident as a parody of the Irish Easter Rising: events that are so similar in the course but so different in the outcome.

But more often, Yeats should be treated as a symbol in Louise Ho's poems. One may be easily distracted by comparing Louise Ho's work with Yeats's when reading her poems; yet, the poet is not necessarily making reference to Yeats's idea or making intertextual links and allusions to his works when she is mentioning Yeats in her poems. She is not trying to bring in the romantic nationalist movement and sentiments of Yeats into her poems or to introduce them to her readers. The fact of the matter is, Yeats is sublimated into a symbol and an ideal more than a person in Louise Ho's works. Mentioned or unmentioned, in poems like "Well Spoken Cantonese", "Writing is Bleak", Yeats has become a symbol of some distant perfection, ideal romantic aestheticism, heroic nationalism, vigorous cultural and historical heritage which are desirable and yet never applicable and obtainable to Hong Kong and to the poet. Yeats has become the archetype of beauty and aestheticism for Louise Ho and at the same time, the romantic, wanted, yet missing nationalist sentiment for Hong Kong and its people.

## IV. Answers to Yeats: Confronting Nationality with Lingual Internationality

If one must study the relationship and resemblance between W.B. Yeats's and Louise Ho's poetry, one must focus on the undertones in Ho's works instead of tracing superficial, stylistic and thematic resemblances.

With the similarities in historical and political background, Ho regards the decolonization of Hong Kong as a perversion of the independence movement of Ireland. She is, therefore, creating her poems as the parody of Yeats's poems. In her poems she explores and examines the values of romantic nationalism which are highly cherished by Yeats and studies the inapplicability of such values in the present world and in the situation of Hong Kong. At the same time, without an appropriate model given by Yeats, Louise Ho is examining her own suggestions of possibilities and alternatives to the identity of Hong Kong. She is giving a down-to-earth answer to Yeats's mythologized and romanticized hypothesis on the nationalist notion and movements.

The study of the poem "Remembering 4th June 1989" in the previous section reveals the inconsistency of Louise Ho's voice in the poem; as a matter of fact, inconsistency is one of the prominent styles of the poet with which she conveys her view of the city. While Yeats is consistent and actually single-minded and persistent in his view towards Irish Independence and faith in Irish nationalism, Louise Ho seems to be lost in her search for identity for herself and for Hong Kong. "Remembering 4th June 1989" is the best illustration of the poet's flickering feelings towards China which play a crucial role in how Hongkongers define themselves. Without a recognition of and apathy towards China and its communist government, Ho and most Hongkongers fail to get themselves an identity by identifying themselves as Chinese. Sometimes, the poet even has difficulty in providing a clear, non-conflicting view towards Hong Kong as her home. Unlike Yeats, who has Ireland always as the subject matter of his poem, the linguistic homeland of his creativity and psychological home of

his nostalgia, Louise Ho's notion of home seems to be detached and independent from the city and the focus of her poems moves from Hong Kong to Australia, Britain, United States and all around the world. It seems that she is not able to find herself a stable and accommodating identity like the Irish nationality that Yeats has created. Nevertheless, the poem "Migratory" is able to justify her inconsistency:

> ...[Australia] Another Anglophone settlement
> Irish, Cockney, North country
> Transported cultures
> Transformed in two hundred years
> Into new shapes new sounds
> And endless possibilities
> At first the heart longs
> For the absent familiar
> Cosmopolitan Hong Kong
> Its chaos, its anomalies, its power
> Or England, my other world
> Or some landmark somewhere
> A villa by Serlio on the way
> To Erbusco, outside Milan
> Or family, relatives
> In New York, San Francisco
> Vancouver, Toronto...[142]

All these places and countries a share similar background with Hong Kong and in it, Hong Kong can find its own image and probably foresee its own future. And more importantly, it tells the social phenomenon of Hong Kong that families are scattered all over the world due to migration. The poet exclaims in the latter part of the poem, "I float, I drift, I hover/ Cannot settle/ Cannot come to stay" (Migratory"). It reveals the rootlessness of the city.

---

[142] Louise Ho, "Migratory" in *New Ends, Old Beginnings*.

From another poem, "Home to Hong Kong", readers are shown the poet's view of the modern lifestyle and new concept of identity in the modern world:

> A Chinese
> Invited an Irishman
> To a Japanese meal
> By the Spanish Steps
> In the middle of Rome
> Having come from Boston
> On the way home

As the title of the poem suggests, "Home to Hong Kong" is one of many of Louise Ho's poems which discuss the notion of "home" in relation to this British colony. Yet, the concept is not tackled directly and the word "home", in fact, only appears twice in this short narrative poem. Instead of looking into the issue in a direct, straightforward and explicit way, the poet of this poem chooses to reflect on the problematic notion of "home" to Hong Kong people from an indirect and innovative perspective.

In this poem, differing from most of her other poems, Louise Ho has tried to undercut the authorial voice by adopting a less subjective perspective through an anonymous third person persona. She has wittily reduced the macroscopic cultural issue of the identity of Hong Kong into a microscopic personal level of taste and choice of life. Ho is making use of the narration of the seemingly unimportant daily routine of the persona to symbolize and represent the political and social overview of the city. Again, the poet uses her reputed style of witty and ironic understatement to draw her readers' attention and focus their reflection on the philosophical issues in the subtext. The crudeness and the shortness of the poet's narrative of the process of the persona's journey back home definitely

contrast with the readers' expectation. Indeed, instead of a more detailed description of what home is as the title of the poem may suggest, "home" is mentioned once at the end of the poem. The person is distracted whereas the readers are overwhelmed by the variety of cultures that they are exposed to on the person's journey of returning home.

What is more, the idea of going home in Hong Kong literature is inevitably associated with the decolonizing, and the returning of Hong Kong to China. In this way, the poet tactfully reveals the social reality that "home to Hong Kong" is never clearly defined, since Hong Kong culture coupled with the ethnic Chinese culture of Hong Kong is undermined by the vibrant Western and modern cultures to which it is exposed. Since the persona of the poem is analogous to decolonizing Hong Kong, it is one of the possible suggestions of the poem that Hong Kong is attractive due to its eventfulness and broad exposure during the adventure-like colonial era and decolonizing period. The Pearl of the Orient will simply lose its attraction once it is home. At the same time, the poem may also suggest the hollowness of "home" in the case of Hong Kong. Hong Kong has been assimilated and exposed to multi-culturalism. With all aspects of life borrowed from other cultures, Hong Kong has lost a "home culture" to identify with. Home is itself not identifiable. Louise Ho creates irony in her poem through suggesting that nothing of Hong Kong is Chinese or unique except its mere name. The concept of home for Hong Kong is internalized to become a psychological formation which is detachable from the physical space of the city itself. Instead of creating a fixed nationality for Hong Kong (which is next to impossible as Hong Kong has never been a nation) like Yeats does, Ho demonstrates a more vivid possibility, offering Hong

Kong a fluid internationality.

That may also explain the poet's anxiety about change. Even though both Yeats and Louise Ho show their sensitivity to time and change in their poems, their attitude towards change is very different. Undoubtedly, Yeats welcomes change and his political poems reveal his anticipation of political change in Ireland. Louise Ho's poems are imbued with a strong sense of nostalgia and resistance to change. While wittily exploiting "dead lines" in expressing her worry about the deadline of 1997 and the political change which will threaten the present status quo and future prosperity in "A Good Year", she reinforces her reluctance to accept change and her wish to preserve the cultural quality of the city, if political change is really inevitable, in "Flags and Flowers". The political turmoil, the fear of communist rule, revealed in the study of political poems like "Hong Kong riots 1967 I & II", may have already explained part of the reason for the poet's reluctance to accept change. Nevertheless the poem "Island" offers a fuller explanation of the poet's nostalgia:

> We are a floating island
> Kept afloat by our own energy
> We cross date lines
> National lines
> Class lines
> Horizons far and near
>
> We are a floating island
> We have no site
> Nowhere to land
> No domicile
>
> Come July this year
> We may begin to hover in situ

May begin to settle
May begin to touch down
We shall be
A city with a country
An international city becoming national[143]

The first stanza of the poem echoes "Home to Hong Kong" and "Migratory" in presenting the idea of home and fluidity of Hong Kong identity. Here the poet makes her stance clear by showing pride and approval of the city's integrity and independence, enabling it to keep "afloat by our own energy". And, in the light of this, the 1997 handover will change the status quo of the city. With Hong Kong coming under the sovereignty of China, its integrity and the unique international identity of which the poet is proud will come to an end. Nevertheless, there is a hint of optimism in the poet's tone in the last few lines of the poem. After ages of rootless self-support and independence, the poet seems to welcome the idea of "settling" and "touching down". The new nationality provides Hong Kong with a stable and protective identity to reside in and rely on.

At the same time, Louise Ho exhibits the inconsistency of her views and the complexity of her feelings towards the change in the poem "Chek Lap Kok". Once again, the poet makes a place into a symbolic metonym of the city. While using a rootless island to symbolize the rootless, fluid quality of Hong Kong identity, she uses *Chek Lap Kok*, the site of the new international airport, to represent the international connections of the city. Louise Ho views this symbol like the motif of the airport in Xu Xi's *Hong Kong Rose*, as a representation of the busy modern city life of Hong Kong, and at the same time as a powerful symbol of setting off and changing

[143] Louise Ho, "Island" in *New Ends, Old Beginnings*.

which reflects the reality and situation that Hong Kong is facing. On one hand, the airport represents the internationality and hybridity of Hong Kong identity since it reflects the busy cosmopolitan life of Hong Kong and connects the city to the world; on the other hand, the airport symbolizes the terminal, the crossroads at which Hong Kong is situated in facing its future. Indeed, the poet has heightened the intensity which the political change has brought to the city by depicting the change in the landscape of this newly building airport:

> Arid landscape stretching for miles
> Over a man-made island
> Little men
> Little jeeps
> Coloured pennants
> Criss-cross the dusty yellow earth
> From a *Star Wars* movie set
> A vast central tower has arisen
> Amidst chrome steel fiberglass
> And other contorted shapes and sizes.[144]

The first part of the poem echoes "Island" in praising the energy of the city in constructing the airport from nothingness, similar to converting a backward village into a modernized metropolis:

> Artifice driven to its limits
> Has called for the largest
> Urban construction project ever
> More costly than the Chunnel
> It spreads over and under the city
> Like a gigantic octopus
> Of roads rail bridges tunnels
> Train stations grow underground
> Above gouged out hollows
> The city treads on space.

[144] Louise Ho, "Chek Lap Kok" in *New Ends, Old Beginnings*.

The poet extends her argument by describing the connectivity of the city. By building the airport, the city tries to prove not only its prosperity and ability to build "the largest/ urban construction project ever" ("Chek Lap Kok"), but also the importance of the transport network, connectivity and accessibility for the city. The invisible network in the sky and the visible railway network on and under the ground have spread all over the city: "it spreads over and under the city/ like a gigantic octopus/ of roads rail bridges tunnels/ train stations grow underground/ above gouged out hollows/ the city treads on space". These powerful lines reveal the fact that transport, connection with the outer world has become part of the city. The airport has become the embodiment of the city and the connectivity and hybridity it entails now represents the identity of Hong Kong. And thus, the change of the status quo, the 1997 handover, has a great impact on its identity. The poet registers the impact of this political change when she uses the image of the new airport which is to be opened in 1998, the first year after Communist Chinese takeover, as a demonstration of Hong Kong sovereignty. The magnificent and luxuriously built airport seems to be a tool used by the authority to prove the continued stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. However, the undertone heavy in the last stanza hints at the skepticism towards this optimistic political gesture:

> Come to land
> In the new airport
> In nineteen ninety-eight

Though the lines seem to be promoting the new airport, the unusual image of landing depicted by the poet insinuates that subtle changes are being undergone within the city. Instead of using the commonly adopted image of taking-off from the airport, the poet picks the opposite image. In doing this,

the poem suggests a change of perspective on the relationship between Hong Kong and the world. The airport, which was previously used by the city as a means to "take off" and connect determinedly with the world, has now become a terminal where the city waits passively for foreign arrivals. In this sense, Hong Kong seems to have given up its subjectivity in building up and preserving its international identity and connectivity. It is waiting for and leaving the world to judge and decide what type of relationship that they want to maintain with the city after 1997. The poet thus reveals her fear that the apparent prosperity is merely an illusion and political disguise. Hong Kong is going to lose its position of choice in deciding its role and identity, and will be subjected to the international verdict concerning its continued international identity. The poet's resistance to change and her reluctance to give up Hong Kong internationality in exchange for a Chinese nationality are clearly signalled in this poem.

## V. Alternatives to Voicelessness: Speaking of Hybridity

I have discussed Louise Ho's idea of voice, language and Hong Kong identity in the first section of this chapter. In her poems, Ho actively and persistently looks for a language which can give her and her people a voice to be heard and to build a unique and independent identity. The poet seems frustrated and disappointed in her journey searching for linguistic identity. She finds that neither English, the colonial language, nor Cantonese, the native dialect, is adequate to give Hongkongers a voice which confers a complete, supportive and viable identity. The poet becomes still more pessimistic in suggesting that both languages and their cultures are packed together within the city. They are entangled, competing, barely compatible

and totally irreconcilable. There seems to be no route for Hong Kong in searching for an identity of its own. And indeed, at the end of the poem "Jamming", the last poem of "Line Drawing" in the first section of *Local Habitation*, the poet exclaims after stanzas describing communicative conflict and opposition between the English and Cantonese languages and cultures,

> Die speech die language
> Words have lost their currency
> The world is too old and
> There is nothing more to say ("Jamming")

Luckily, the poet's creativity does not really end with this frustration. Her book of poems continues and so does her search for Hong Kong identity. Even though the poet still continues to shift her view and switch between narrative voices, there is a glimpse of hope in these scattered voices, instability of stance and rootlessness of identity. The poet attempts to turn these weaknesses into the strengths and unique qualities of Hong Kong. She is trying to take advantage of the rootlessness of Hong Kong in creating its fluid, hybrid identity.

The poet, indeed, is to some extent influenced by the modernist view towards identity in the modern world. She has claimed the impossibility of the combination of two cultures in forming a new Hong Kong identity in "Jamming". As was said in the first section, she finds it a problem and even a threat that these two incommunicable languages and cultures co-exist within Hong Kong. Hongkongers can neither reside stably and solely within either one, nor integrate them into one culture:

> Have you ever tried merging
> The time-stressed with the syllable-stressed
> Within one discourse

geeleegulu

Call it what you will
Variously-tongued
Multicultural
Cosmopolitan or apartheid
Each is to the other

geeleegulu
("Jamming")

The poet seems to be skeptical of arrival at integrity in the cultural voicing of Hong Kong. Instead, she believes that, lacking cultural integrity, the voice of Hong Kong will simply dissolve and scatter into meaningless utterances. Similarly, the self will remain in endless internal conflict and the identity of Hong Kong will remain fragmented.

As well as noting the lack of a whole, complete self and voice at the psychological and cultural level, the poet also presents the inconsistency and incoherence of the scattered voices at the communal level. As was mentioned in the previous section's discussion of "Remembering 4th June 1989", it is Louise Ho's style to adopt multiple voices in her poems. Though the voices are a representation of social reality and public opinions within the society, they also reveal a lack of unity, harmony and common goals amongst the people of Hong Kong. In the lines "but think, my friend, think: China never/ promised a tea party, or cakes/ for the masses",[145] the poet shows how rational but at the same time hardhearted Hongkongers can be. They can immediately detach themselves from the sorrow of the event by claiming "the catalyst/ was [just] our neighbour's blood" while "the stunned world [is still responding], and/ pointing an accusing finger, felt cheated". Not only do they lack compassion towards their fellow ethnic

[145] Louise Ho, "Remembering 4th June, 1989" in *New Ends, Old Beginnings*.

Chinese in China, but they also lack a shared sentiment amongst themselves. They lack the commitment and unity to sacrifice their own wants in order to achieve a bigger ideal. They are just keen to "survive", "each in his own way/the tautness of the rope/underfoot".

What is more, the persona's voice changes from poem to poem. While in most of her poems, such as her political poems "Remembering 4th June 1989", and "Flags and Flowers", or her symbolic poems like "Island", and "Meeting", the poet adopts a collective voice representing the various viewpoints of Hongkongers towards their city, in "Writing is Bleak" and "Summer in Warwick", she restores her personal voice and expresses her view of the experience of problems of identity, and culture clashes that she has encountered as an English-speaking poet, as professional and as an individual Hongkonger. The voices in "Hong Kong Riots, 1967 I & II" and "Home to Hong Kong" shift to take a larger perspective. The tone of persona has become more detached as the poet considers her city from an outsider's point of view. And in poems like "The Australian *O*" and "Knocking at the door of the Aboriginals" the poet temporarily puts to one side the dominant subject of Hong Kong and tries to explore the new experience and possibility of adopting a new voice and the new identity of a traveler and migrant. In "Migratory", she gives up completely the notion of a static voice and solid identity. Her voice as a Hongkonger transcends physical movement between Hong Kong and Australia, the Americas and Europe. It subsumes and goes beyond individual cultures and nationalities. Here Louise Ho takes the advantage of the rootlessness of Hong Kong identity and the multiplicity of its voices. She, through her poems, reveals the flexibility and adaptability of these voices. The identity of Hong Kong,

like the voices which she presents in her poems, is fluid, changing and dynamic. It is neither rigid in form nor static in space. It is inclusive of all cultures and languages and thus, is hybrid and international. It transcends physical boundaries and overleaps cultural limits.

# CONCLUSION

## *Towards Postcolonial Identity*

It is undeniable that the Far East is emerging to become another potential centre of new English Literature after the Americas, the South Pacific, the Caribbean and India. A culture of English writing now flourishes in the former British colonies in Southeast Asia, such as Singapore and Malaysia. But at the same time, due to the trend of globalization, Americanization and other economic factors, many Asian powers, like China and Japan, have become strongly influenced by Anglo-American culture. The last decade has seen the emergence of a new generation of Japanese and Chinese writers who write in English regardless of the fact that they have never experienced colonial rule. For them, the English medium of writing is more a matter of choice and experiment. It is a means of expressing their individual view of a globalized English culture, and their resistance and rebellion against their own ancient Chinese and Japanese cultures. It also shows their wish to appeal to a broader readership. Interestingly, though possessing the cultural advantage of having first-hand experience of colonization and the conveniences of a well-established colonial administration, such as an education system, as well as the financial and economic advantage of being the bridge between East and West as a cosmopolitan city in Asia, Anglophone culture in Hong Kong has yet to become a powerful force. Its Anglophone literature can neither develop into a prominent mainstream culture as in Singapore and Malaysia, nor become an influential alternative counteracting traditional culture as in China and Japan.

As I have mentioned in both the Introduction and Chapter Two of this thesis, Hong Kong published its own English writing anthology as early as in the 1970s.[146] However, this Anglophone writing trend came to an abrupt halt. Since then, English literary study has remained a symbol of elitism, and English literature has been exclusively taught in a few select, missionary schools. At the same time, the taste of Hong Kong English readers and the academics has been generally conservative and pro-colonial. Choices of literary texts for teaching at both secondary school level and university level mainly focused on mainstream classics and on importing English national literature to the colony. Decolonizing Hong Kong for a while showed little ambition in developing its own English dialect and English writing culture. It was not until the mid-eighties, sparked off by the breaking news of the PRC's reclaiming of sovereignty over Hong Kong, that native Anglophone writing appeared once again on the market. The adoption of the colonial language in writing definitely reveals the anxiety and sense of identity crisis that were produced by a period of political uncertainty. It signals a rejection of an imposed identity, and becomes a way in which these native Hong Kong writers assert and construct their own identity. Hence, my research is concerned with postcolonialism in the particular instance of the literature that has emanated from Hong Kong; and its aim has been to dissect and explore the use of the English language by native Hong Kong writers in expounding the cultural and linguistic identity of Hong Kong. The question posed by such an adoption of the English language is whether this identity is effectively

[146] *Images on Shifting Water*, edited by Joyce Hsia and T.C.Lai was an anthology of Hong Kong English poems that came out in 1970s.

expressed.

Bringing together the writings of Xu Xi, Agnes Lam and Louise Ho, three prominent female Hong Kong writers with differing cultural backgrounds and social experiences, this study has attempted to consider whether their manner of writing has been produced by cultural displacements, diasporic experience and a linguistic and cultural identity crisis. This raises the question of whether a thoroughly Hong Kong linguistic identity may be said to have emerged from a specific postcolonial situation, or whether a hybrid identity already existed prior to the political upheavals. But, regardless of their differing representations of Hong Kong identity, the three writers have in common a distinctive conception of it: for them, flexibility, fluidity and rootlessness are the essential features of Hong Kong culture; it therefore differes from a culture formed by stabilities of nationality, races and spatial boundary.

Xu Xi's notion of the "supergirl" and Louise Ho's idea of a de-territorialised Hong Kong identity suggest that Hong Kong is moving towards a postcolonial identity which is not limited by space and nationality, or even by race and culture. On the other hand, Agnes Lam's microscopic view of identity as personal and apolitical also reveals the highly individualistic nature of Hong Kong society. Hong Kong cultural identity has flourished, showing differing potentialities for different individuals and a capacity for taking highly varied forms. Hong Kong seems to have been able to release itself from marginal and ambiguous situations, transcending this to explore its own unique hybridity.

My research has focused on the Anglophone writing published before 1997. 1997 marked a significant change not only to the political status but

also in the cultural and ideological mentality in the city. It is undeniable that the issue of 1997 brought out the anxiety of Hong Kong people and posed an unprecedented threat to the identity of Hong Kong. Nevertheless, this epochal political change also inspired Hong Kong people to rethink their problematic yet comforting colonized identity. The pre-1997 decade was a period of self-awakening for Hong Kong people. Mingling with the fear of Communist rule, the realization of the inappropriateness of being British colonized subjects, and a feeling of uncertainty about Hong Kong's future, was eagerness for self-understanding, self-determination and an ambition to redefine and establish a specific identity for Hong Kong people. This prevalent atmosphere of self-questioning produced a favourable environment for cultural creative activity, especially postcolonial writing. The pre-97 period was in fact the period of postcolonialism for Hong Kong. The re-emergence of Anglophone literature marked a new era of cultural self-awareness for Hong Kong. Although one should never overlook the breadth of concerns in Xu Xi's, Louise Ho's and Agnes Lam's English writing, it should also be accepted that the medium of writing has defined a very unambiguous postcolonialist stance. Local Anglophone writing has pointed to the demise of an imposed homogeneous, colonized identity, and sees Hong Kong as coming into possession of a heterogeneous postcolonial identity.

However, Xu Xi's expression of her feeling of exile and Louise Ho's repeated references to Communist China hint that the handover can be understood as a threat to the flourishing of Hong Kong's unique hybrid identity. Interestingly enough, postcolonial reflection of Hong Kong seems to cease when the ex-colony entered into its post-colonial era. The abrupt

ending at the eve of 1st July 1997 in Xu Xi's *Unwalled City* seems to be the novelist's chosen rejection of this new Communist era in Hong Kong. [147] Yet, ironically, this inconsequential finale is an exact reflection of the curb placed on heterogeneous creativity and postcolonial enquiry in Hong Kong. Just like Hong Kong, comfortably settling in as a part of ancient Chinese culture and of a growing world power, literary writing in Hong Kong, including Anglophone literature, has apparently lost its determination to explore the open possibilities of identities lying before the city. As compared with the flourishing richness of the pre-97 literary work, there was a turn towards more conservative themes in the post-colonial literature of Hong Kong. Once again, literary work fell back on singularity of theme and perspective, and the choice of Hong Kong identity reverted to unquestioning acceptance of a Chinese one. Such regression is obvious in Chinese writing; but unfortunately, this conservative change is notable even in Anglophone writing, such as Agnes Lam's work.

In the Chinese literary circle, writers have been actively involved in promoting a collective memory of Hong Kong which directly leads to a formation of shared identity for Hong Kong people and encourages them to develop a sense of loyalty and belonging to the city and their origin. One of the most notable examples is Wong Bik Wan's novel *The Portrait of Virtuous Ladies* 《烈女圖》 (1998), which is a project funded by the Arts Development Council of the Hong Kong Government. *The Portrait of Virtuous Ladies* is an autobiographical novel of three generations of women based on the real life experiences of Hong Kong women who experienced the Second World War, Japanese Occupation, Hong Kong Riots and the

[147] Including *Unwalled City*, actually, all Xu Xi's stories end before 1997.

decolonizing period of British colonial rule in Hong Kong. The significance behind this project is the involvement of the government in deciding the direction of the development of the cultural identity of Hong Kong. By emphasizing the shared history, collective memory and common wounds of the experience of being marginalized by numerous foreign invasions and social instabilities, literary works with such themes can easily gain the identification of their readers, especially in the period when Hong Kong people are at a cross road. In fact, rather than questioning existing identity and exploring the varieties and possibilities of a flexible identity, literary work about collective memory promotes oneness and unity in Hong Kong. And in most cases, this oneness and unity is pointing directly to the Chineseness in Hong Kong identity and renouncing other choices of identity which are considered disloyal and unorthodox. With such a clear indication of the government choice, researchers in the academia in Hong Kong seem to be conscious working closely with the government. The research focus of cultural and literary scholars in Hong Kong switches from an Anglo-local diasporic identity to Pan-China-Hong Kong globalizing identity. Postcolonialist scholars in English Literature such as K. K Tam, Timothy Weiss and Benzi Zhang all have now changed their research interest to the potential big market of China. Books about globalization and cultural studies of China, such as *English and globalization: perspectives from Hong Kong and Mainland China.*[148] have begun to emerge in the market since 1997. Indeed, following the general trend in academia and literary circles, Agnes Lam's main focus has shifted

[148] Tam Kwok Kan, Timothy Weiss (ed.) *English and Globalization: Perspective from Hong Kong and Mainland China.* (Hong Kong : Chinese University Press, c2004).

from her personal search for a multicultural identity to a more macroscopic, politically correct, implicitly propagandist Chinese cultural self in her second poetry collection *Water Wood Pure Splendour* (2000). The poet devotes one section of her collection to exploring her teaching experience in China, which is symbolically her linguistic search of her Chinese roots (even though it is about her teaching English in China). Unlike her previous poetry collection, *Water Wood Pure Splendour* is no longer about Agnes Lam's multicultural experience, it is an reassertion of her link with China and her Chinese identity. And in poems like "Yellow flowers on a battlefield" and "To the teacher who cried", numerous Chinese images, cultural and linguistic references are included. And in fact, Agnes Lam's preference to adopt Chinese roots is actually stated quite obviously to the readers by the choice of title: "Water Wood Pure Splendour" is a direct translation from a Chinese idiom. Agnes Lam's English poem is but an English mimicry translated directly from her Chinese self. Just like many of her contemporaries, Agnes Lam has readily accepted that her work should be a tool for promoting collective memory which directly and indirectly helps create a singular, inescapable Chinese cultural identity. She celebrates with many others and glorifies this fixed Chinese identity in "Children of the dragon" and accepts readily and even helps promote this patriotism:

> A dance so ancient,
> yet so understood, it must have been
> genetically programmed into the blood
> of the children even as
> the dragon slept for a millennium.
> [...]
> The record event was organized

by youth groups in Hong Kong and China.
Anson Chan, representing Tung Chee Hwa,
Jackie Chan, the film star, and members
of the Liberation Army were there

As children of the dragon,
once only the emblem of emperors,
lying in the depths beneath oceans,
soaring to the heights beyond heavens,
ruling over wind, rain and creation.[149]

It seems that, burdened by the consciousness of being part of the growing Pan-Chinese cultural circle, and by the self-censorship of being Chinese under PRC rule, academics and many intellectuals have willingly given up their previous critical thoughts on the possibility of embracing a hybrid, fluid identity, accepting conformity with the sovereign power.

With its linguistic and geographical advantages, Anglophone Hong Kong literature definitely has the potential to develop into an influential literary force. But Hong Kong seems to lack the ambition and determination to develop local English culture in the way that its fellow Asian Tiger Singapore has done. What key pre-requisite is Hong Kong missing in failing to cultivate the Anglophone writing trend? It seems that the main problem which Hong Kong is facing is self-censorship in writing in the colonial language after 1997, going with self-imposed patriotism and loyalty to Chinese cultural identity. Even though it is obvious that a few Anglophone writers, like Xu Xi, are putting much effort into promoting the Anglophone writing trend, and although Hong Kong does possess an abundant supply of English readers due to the new generation of returning Hong Kong emigrants, the lack of support from academia nevertheless

[149] Agnes Lam, "Children of the dragon" in *Water Wood Pure Splendour*.

obstructs the development of this writing. Will Anglophone writing in Hong Kong pass out of existence once again? Given the fact that the majority of the existing established Anglophone writers possess a Southeast Asian background, together with its unique political and cultural experience, as well as its similar colonial experience in the cases of Malaysia and Singapore, it is to be hoped that Hong Kong will be able to make use of its unique multicultural advantages in learning from the successful experience of SE Anglophone writing, and in being part of the development of a prominent new form of English literature in the Far East.

# APPENDIX ONE

## *Email Correspondence with Xu Xi*

I finally had the space to read your dissertation chapter and am really impressed, and delighted as well, by your analysis of both my work and Hong Kong's situation.

Well, not being a "scholar" in the classic academic sense (note: I never did a PhD and a MFA is really a creative writing degree with a Masters in literature at best), I'm not entirely sure what to tell you. I can make some comments on points of fact, but there are other better readers for you at the university, I'm sure. Also, the author is often not the best person to comment on her own work, but let me at least give you some impressions, since you were kind enough to send me this chapter.

What most delighted me, I must admit, was your ability and willingness to read the political subtext of my novels. I have always been interested in politics (at one time I considered doing a further degree in political science), but Hong Kong was probably the worse place to study politics, since it is such an apolitical culture (although that has changed over time, but certainly the Hong Kong world I grew up, lived and worked in didn't pay much attention to politics). Yet all life is inherently political, and as the feminists remind us, the personal is the political. So the confused and ambivalent tone that permeates my work has always felt to me like the only way to "comment" on the political situation in Hong Kong. I especially like the way you read the incest between Ai Lin & Philip – the reception to

the novel when it first appeared was quite controversial, mostly because of the incest, but for me the incest was truly a symbol, rather than a desire to be controversial, since I had been writing sexual themes long before that novel (the chapter on Philip & Me had been previously published in an anthology in the U.S. to no controversy) and was quite taken aback by the reaction in Hong Kong.

By the way, a point of fact: Chinese Walls appeared in 1994. Daughters of Hui appeared as a separate book in 1996. So Hong Kong Rose is actually my third, not my second book, although it is my second published novel. The compendium edition you probably read (w/Ingham's introduction) is a second edition that appeared later. You might also be interested to know that Chinese Walls was my first published novel but not my first novel. I wrote three others before that book, the first one being much more overtly political about 1997 (I finished that first novel in 1982 or thereabouts). Those three manuscripts were never published as books even though several editors had nice things to say about all of them (one manuscript even won me a fiction fellowship). I could always get short stories published, because these were more varied and less Hong Kong centric, unlike my novels. No one was terribly interested in anything anyone had to say about Hong Kong in fiction (except for thrillers and genre writing where Hong Kong was merely a backdrop, or diasporic work like Timothy Mo's, but even he was an exception) until we got closer to 1997. Then suddenly, I experienced Aristotle's "reversal of fortune"! I have to say though that the likes of Kingston helped writers like me because her work created a marketplace for Chinese subjects in serious fiction (while Tan

helped popular fiction for Chinese subjects a great deal).

The point where we diverge is probably on how and why one writes fiction. Most novelists and fiction writers I know are not really as self conscious about audience or intent of the fiction as you portray us when we write our books. Bottom line: we have a fundamental need to tell a story, regardless of language, where we grew up, what our political agendas might be. In fact, the only way I know how to write a piece of fiction is to suspend editorializing and write the story. That is what I teach in creative writing as well. So I didn't set out to write for any specific audience, since any decent writer worth her salt simply doesn't do that (or at least, she really shouldn't). However, by writing in English, I do of course recognize that the audience is the English reading one which is largely in the West. But that doesn't mean I consciously try to portray Hong Kong in any way other than the one I know and observe. However, I do believe, as you point out in the quote from my essay, that English limits portrayal of the majority Hong Kong culture because it's simply not the majority language. (Hence, the world of my novels is by definition a minority experience in Hong Kong, although I would not call it any less "authentic," just not the majority experience – I do not think being a minority makes you less authentic, just less representative of the majority experience). Which is why I have ambivalent thoughts about an Anglophone Hong Kong literature since it may or may not have a future. But writers are individuals and not necessarily representatives of any one particular nation or society or culture, even though these dubious distinctions and roles are sometimes imposed upon them. We don't necessarily seek this. That's just the nature

of having published work and how we are read is removed from what we were actually trying to do. I often say that once I've published something, it's not "mine" anymore but belongs to whoever in the world reads it. Each reader brings him or herself to the reading, regardless of what the author might have "intended."

I was intrigued by your comment that only by giving up nationality in my work do I gain total creative autonomy, because I've never thought my creative was not autonomous (no one tells me what to write or even how to write it, after all, and most especially not the marketplace since I am not a "best seller" writer who is perhaps more subject to "pleasing" their readership). I gave up the idea of nationality when

I was 14 or 15, at which time I actually seriously sought to get a World Passport (such a thing does exist, believe it or not). For practical reasons, I do have a nationality of course and a passport (U.S.) to travel on, but I don't think much about nationality vis a vis my work (other people call me an Asian American or a Hong Kong or a New York or a Post Colonial writer or whatever; I call myself a fiction writer and essayist). These days, my latest creative writing teaching interest is around something I call "global narrative." I'm actually offering a workshop through UCLA's Extension Writing Program online right now on writing this kind of fiction and nonfiction. It seems to me that many hybrid types like myself who happen to write do turn towards an increasingly globalized narrative, one that defies easy categorization by nationality and place. And the linguistic challenge is to render a multitude of languages and voices in one language since it is difficult, though not impossible, to write in more than one

language simultaneously (parallel texts in translation are not the same thing). In my case, it's English, which I use to render Chinese, both Putonghua and Cantonese, not just the language but the culture, environment, experience, people of the Hong Kong (and the world) that I know as well. But equally, a Chinese language writer who wishes to present a German character in Hong Kong needs to find some way to "write German" elegantly in Chinese.

It is also interesting to note that there are now several Mainland Chinese writers, with limited cultural or linguistic reason to write in English (as I have being from a multicultural background with English as a primary language & Hong Kong was after all a British colony once) who have chosen to do so. In some cases, their motivations seem much more commercially inclined and audience centric than in my case (especially the ones who desperately require editors because their English language fluency is highly questionable, in any kind of English, British, American, whatever; I can at least honestly claim fluency and hence can "hear" English reasonably well in several of its forms – Liverpool English however I can't claim to hear, not easily at least!). Audience, in Hong Kong for ANY kind of serious literature in English in the 1970's, when I was first writing as an adult??? You have to be joking. Several local editors & journalists, and even the one publisher of Asian work back then (Heinemann's) told me to go try elsewhere (so I went to London and New York). I chose America as the best place because Hong Kong was a hopeless place to learn to write fiction and novels in English since the universities were certainly not teaching it or doing much in that regard

(Christopher New was one of the rare examples but he never taught creative writing and I didn't know him then; the only real writer I knew back then was Derek Maitland, and he was writing novels about Vietnam: the one literary journal IMPRINT at HKU only lasted for 4 issues and I was probably one of the few if not the only Asians from Hong Kong published in any of their issues). For writers, we're really a whole lot LESS about "audience" than we are about the need to write our particular slice of life in fiction or whatever, and then hoping like hell we'll find anyone who'll publish us and then that someone anywhere will read us! Of course critics see things very differently, I realize.

Well I hope that's helpful and attached are my answers to your interview questions. Do let me know you received this and don't hesitate to email if you have any questions.

Best,

Xu Xi

# APPENDIX TWO

*Interview*

C: First of all, many thanks for agreeing to participate in this interview and the followings are the questions on which I would like to consult you.

C: There are several incidents when you make reference to the notion of naming in your works: Lao Tzu's riddle in the prologue of *Daughters of Hui* "Your name or your person. Which is dearer?", Ai Lin, "the girl with no English name" in *Chinese Walls*, as well as Rose is "as sweet by another name" in *Hong Kong Rose*. It seems to me that through these, you are discussing the close relationship between one's name and his/her identity. And I believe that your various pen-names represent different aspects of your identity. So, what are the factors which lead you to the decision of eventually forgoing your Indonesian pen-names Sussy Komala and Sussy Chako for the Chinese name Xu Xi?

X: It's true that the names you list could be called "pen names," but not literally so, because a pen name generally implies a made up name as opposed to a real one. The names I used were all **bylines,** which is a more accurate term, because they were all my real names. But the decision of which name to use really had everything to do with what my legal name of the moment was, and much less to do with conscious choice. The issue of names and identity for me is unusually complicated, because of nationality vs. ethnicity, family language & dialect, marriages & divorces, as well as publishing considerations. My legal name at birth was Sussy KHOUW

(Fujianese transliteration for "Hui" in Cantonese), and as a child that was my by line (I publish my juvenilia in the SCMP Young Post in the 1960's). At around the age of 16 or so, my family changed our name legally to an Indonesian one (we were Indonesian citizens) for political reasons, as well as business considerations for my father, and I became Sussy KOMALA, which is still my legal name today. I published my earliest adult fiction under this name. In 1984/5, after a couple of years of marriage to Greg Chapopoulo, we both agreed to change our last name by combining the first syllables of both our last names – this was a concession to peace in my marriage because my ex-husband felt very, very strongly about our having the same last name, and I refused to change mine to his and also refused to have him change his to mine (he proposed this, my ex-husband was a curious man, to say the least, but then, he *is* a jazz musician whose art demands constant improvisation; he still uses Greg Chako as his professional and legal name today . . . ;). So I became Sussy CHAKO, the name I call my "American" name because it was under this name that I became a U.S. citizen. I published much of my short fiction prior to 1996 under this name as well as my first book, the novel *Chinese Walls* (1994). The publication of that first novel caused a minor stir, a teapot tempest, for two reasons: first, it dealt with incest in Hong Kong and second, everyone thought the author was Indian (Chakho is a Keralan name) and could not understand why an Indian author was writing about Chinese families. Mind you, the problem occurred *only* because the book was published in Asia. I published stories in America about Chinese characters under the name Sussy Chako for several years and the question of ethnicity *never* came up. However, Asia is blinkered, especially Hong Kong's reading

public, which is sadly, sadly over-literal, un-ironic and in general, not at all well-read. So "literature" explodes over all the wrong things. Anyway, be that as it may, my publisher of the time and I jointly agreed that it would be a good idea to use my Chinese name for my second book *Daughters of Hui,* and beyond.

Which therefore brings up the issue of what actually is my "real" Chinese name. The person who named me at birth was my father, a Mandarin speaker who frankly hated Cantonese (the language) because, I suspect, he felt awkward in Hong Kong of the 1950's that was so very, very Cantonese in outlook and language. He named me XU SU XI – I use *pinyin*, but if you check the Yale Romanization standard, the first name becomes Su Ssi (hence, Sussy as the English name, although in my father's case, it was chance, that transliteration, and not due to any acquaintance with formal Romanization, which I am fairly certain he did not know – my father died before I could ever confirm this – incidentally, Yale Romanization, despite its limited use now, is often regarded as the best one phonetically for English speakers, though not for other languages which is why *pinyin* became the norm since it's just better, internationally – the CIA for years used Yale for training its operatives – as you can see, I have spent time researching this rather obscure subject as a result of figuring out my name among other things).

But back to the story: because we were Indonesian nationals, "foreigners" in Hong Kong, even though I was born here, my father chose not to give us legal Chinese names. On my birth certificate, I am only Sussy Khouw; my

HKID today does *not* have the "three stars." What you should also know is that I am ethnically mostly Chinese (there is some Indonesian blood on my father's side from about four or five generations earlier), but that culturally, I am far more Chinese than Indonesian (never lived in Indonesia or even spoke the language, although I traveled on an Indonesian passport till I was in my thirties and can order most foods in Bahasa). Of course, growing up in Hong Kong, my name was pronounced in Cantonese at school – HUI SO SAI – and subject to puzzled and amused responses.

Here are the characters:

許素細

I *hated,* loathed my Chinese name as a child because my teachers and peers thought it peculiar. People laughed at it outright (people are like that and children can be overly sensitive, as I was). It *is* odd in Cantonese, admittedly. However, when I studied Mandarin for the first time in graduate school, and began saying my name the way it was intended by my father, in Putonghua/Mandarin, and not Cantonese, the response from both Taiwanese and Beijing people was quite different – it's a beautiful name, they told me, and for the first time, I could be proud of it, proud of my father's ability to choose a good name for his first born child.

You should also know that I *hated,* loathed my English name SUSSY all my life and still do, because even though my father meant for it to be pronounced "Susie," the spelling lends itself to being read to rhyme with "fussy" or "hussy," and to my ear, always sounded awful (yes, English

native speakers are amused by it as well, and people laughed outright, children being sensitive, etc.). Couple that with my original English name, Khouw, meant to be pronounced Ko, but again lends itself to a phonetic rendition of "Cow," you can see why I should find such a name a royal pain in the neck and something to abandon if I could.

Bottom line, I didn't really "decide" to use a particular byline, I just used my real name until after my first book. All I wanted to do was write, my name be damned. For the second published book, that was when I came up with XU XI, a short form of my "real" Chinese name. I *love* this name. It's the first time in my life I've had a name and identity that is as mixed up, curious and complicated as my name and I have been all my life. No, I am not from Beijing. Yes I am mostly Chinese. Yes I speak Chinese although Cantonese is my primary dialect with Putonghua a poor cousin. No I am not an ABC even though I speak like one when I think American but sound like a European or oddly British to American ears. And no, Xu Xi is not on any identity document that is "officially" recognized by any government, state or noation but graces the covers of all my books and appears internationally now as my *only* byline. There are people now who only know me as Xu Xi, which I'm quite happy to use as a name for all seasons, purposes and lives.

Who am I? You're not going to be able to tell from my name. And that, as they say in America, is the "honest truth."

C: I notice that that your language is very different when you are

writing in places. Not only does your pen-name change, but your voice alters when you are addressing to different audience. Are you conscious of your fluid identity and multiple voices? What makes you settle on using the identity of Hong Kong writer? Do you think, Hong Kong allows you to be your "Super Girl" without nationality which empowers you to write?

X: I'm not sure what exactly you mean about my language being "very different" when writing in places? For one thing, my byline is a matter of chronology, not of place. I only use Xu Xi now. I do not consciously "alter" my writing voice for different audiences. However, after this many years of writing and publishing, I am aware that readers in Asia might read me differently than readers in America, *although this is not always necessarily true.* I did not "settle" on an identity as a "Hong Kong writer" anymore than I settled on an identity as a writer. I am a writer. I happen to be from Hong Kong. I do write about Hong Kong, but also about New York, and other parts of the world. I write about people, especially mixed up Chinese people, all over the globe because that is the life I live and know about. Did Hong Kong empower me? Yes and no. It has provided me the most material for my fiction, but it has also been the least useful place to learn to be a writer. America, on the other hand was extremely empowering to me as a writer, because the craft of writing is most progressively taught there. Let's face it, the U.S. were the innovators when it came to creating the idea of an MFA (Masters of Fine Arts) for writers. The country also publishes more English language fiction than anywhere else in the world. So if you want to compete as a writer in English and learn about writing, you'll learn more from a large sea rather than the tiny

puddle that is Hong Kong.

Having said that, the joy of writing in Hong Kong is that I can be a pioneer of sorts, both as a writer and editor of anthologies of local writing. Pioneering is exciting, even though it becomes an oftentimes silly and weighty responsibility. To pioneer is to tread untested paths. This can be risky, foolhardy, and highly unrewarding -- all true for my path as a writer here which I sometimes find a silly waste of time when I'd rather be writing. But it also is a weighty responsibility, because suddenly, other people look to you to "pronounce" on Hong Kong writing and we all know pronouncements are about as meaningful as the whims of the moment.

So does that answer your question? I just write, I don't always think about those things until someone like you comes along and asks.

C: The 1997 handover has definitely an impact on the concept of Hong Kong's identity. The main theme of many Hong Kong writings seems to have moved from the discussion of identity crisis to that of building up of a collective memory (My research, at this moment, focuses mainly on pre-97 writing). This change is especially notable in Chinese writing. However, even Agnes Lam, in her second poetry collection, shifts her focus more to the examination of Hong Kong-Mainland interaction. And what interest me most are the two books, *History's Fiction* and *The Unwalled City*, which you published in 2001. While *History's Fiction* is a time machine, examining the past and the identity of Hong Kong which helps construct a collective memory for the city; the ending of *The Unwalled City* at

midnight of 1st July 97 strikes me by its rejection to accept the new identity. Do you think the historic event has changed your identity as a Hongkonger and as a writer? Are you very conscious of this change in identity and do you have to do a lot of adjustment when you are writing? And how far does this imposed Chineseness affect your creative autonomy?

X: Chinese-ness, imposed or otherwise, will never affect my creative autonomy except insofar as my being part Chinese affects my creativity. For one thing, I always have and always will write in English, the *only* language in which I have achieved complete fluency. Not being linguistically gifted (I do find learning all languages difficult and unnatural), I nevertheless love language, otherwise I wouldn't be a writer. And language confers a certain amount of identity, although I would never in a million years call myself "English" even though that is my chosen language as a writer.

So, identity, specifically Hong Kong's. Of course things have changed, are changing, will continue to change. The Hong Kong I lived in 1975 is different from the Hong Kong of 1982 and 1991 and 1996 (you see, I pick arbitrary dates because dates really are that, just like history, entirely arbitrary). I'm not at all sure *The Unwalled City* as a book "rejects" the new identity; Albert Ho, I think, is ambivalent, despite his privilege. He is one character. Gail Szeto, I suspect, doesn't stop to think about identity with respect to the city because despite her Eurasian heritage, she would very, very much like to be Chinese. As for Andanna, all she really does care about in the end is herself, because she's a pretty, moderately talented,

vain little creature and always will be, which is not to say she can't be a nice person, she can when she wants to, and for her Hong Kong just happens to be home. Vince will go back to America, we presume (although who knows, he might remain in Hong Kong for all I know but I'm done with writing about that man so he'll make very minor appearances at best in my future books – I do like him though).

You know, people are like that, they just are who they are. They don't spend a lot of conscious energy on thinking about their identity. We writers, on the other hand, try to collect what people say and do to work out things like identity. Does history change us or do we change and therefore change the course of history? I suspect it happens concurrently: as one flag goes down, another goes up; as one way of being fades out another arises to take its place. From feathers to ashes back to the rising phoenix. Isn't that just the cycle of life?

I don't really concern myself a whole lot with identity with respect to *how* I write. I will write, regardless, and draw from whatever is around me. It so happens now I get to practice my Putonghua a lot more than before, and a new found civic mindedness has emerged among Hong Kong citizens who are now concerned with their city's heritage and history. Will that affect my work? I imagine so because the way life is affects my work. Likewise, if the changes resulting from the handover begin to create a world I find a bit of a bore, I will stop gazing at it and turn my gaze elsewhere.

In the end, it is whatever slice of the world that is intriguing to me in the

moment that is the one I will write about. When something no longer seems interesting, *for whatever reason,* I will find something else that compels the words to flow.

C: What is Hong Kong Literature? There has been literature produced by Hong Kong writers but it has not started flourishing till the recent two decades. And there is still not a very clear definition for this literary category. So how will you define what Hong Kong Literature, especially Anglophone Hong Kong Literature, is?

X: Let me be literal: Hong Kong Literature is the writing that emerges from this place, nothing else. If not very much writing, especially Anglophone writing, emerges, then there will not be a corpus that can be named "Anglophone Hong Kong Literature." I think, therefore I am. I am, therefore I exist. I exist and what do you know, I happen to write.

C: My observation is that the literary movement in Hong Kong is moving towards two directions: the westernization and diversity of Chinese culture through globalization as well as the influence of the Southeast Asian and Anglo-American Anglophone culture. Do you think the two trends are compatible? Louise Ho once commented in her poem that "Writing is bleak,/Writing in this language in this place is especially bleak", do you share the same feeling with her? Do you think writing in English in Hong Kong has limited the scope of readership of your novels?

How do you compare the Anglophone culture in Southeast Asian countries like Singapore and that of Hong Kong? What will you say about your experience of writing in Hong Kong, in Asia and in America?

X: You might better ask, what can I say about my experience of writing in Switzerland, which I did for the first time in 2005, for three wonderful weeks, in a tiny mountain village near Lausanne, at an international writers' retreat in a grand chateau where I was well fed each evening and given wine with my dinner. I wrote *marvelously*. The pages flew off my computer and each day was filled with the ecstasy of being a writer. And then, the residency came to an end, I went on with my life, and continued to write.

Yes, it can be "bleak" writing in Hong Kong because here, right now, I have to deal with my elderly mother who has Alzheimer's, I do not have my library and acoustic piano as I do back home in northern New York state where my house sits empty and my car unused, the weather is *way* too hot or else *way* too rainy and humid and I do not have much space and find that I live too much in air conditioning. Also, the circle of Anglophone writers in Hong Kong, while friendly, is small.

Yet writing in Hong Kong also means that when I need to check the lay of the land of a particular district, I can hop on the MTR or a bus and get there easily. Whenever I travel on public transport, language and drama fall in my lap because I hear and see it all around me all the time. If nothing else, our Chief Executive and his cronies have a talent to amuse me with their

antics (even though they do also irritate), which is more than I can say for the current U.S. president who did *NOT* get my vote.

There has been and still is a larger, richer, more vital Anglophone literature that emerges out of other post colonial spaces than ours. The reasons are fairly obvious; they've mostly been at it longer than we have. Yet there is something else too which has to do with the Chinese national character. Even though Singapore, say, is at least 60% Chinese, it is a much more multicultural society than Hong Kong. India is huge, extremely multicultural, and has its own *national* and regional cultures, traditions and literatures which many of the Indian Anglophone writers draw on. Even the Philippines, with its motley governments and wobbly economy, does publish a significant amount of Anglophone writing by locals, not just expatriates. Chinese, however, is Chinese first and above everything else, which gets really, really problematic in a globalized world where everyone is a bit of this, a bit of that, and where *"ai guo"* patriotism is becoming ever more outdated, except in China. Chinese-ness, in the political and historical sense, does not want to engage in the world as it is becoming, but rather wishes to shape the world to its own criteria. But literature happens when writers can look at the world as it is and is becoming, and even in terms of writing historical fiction, it still needs to be done through the lens of today. So will Chinese-ness limit literature, especially in Hong Kong? It might, it just might unless the government stops throwing writers in prison just because they do not agree with the party line.

Then there's little Hong Kong where no one really wants to speak, let alone

read English. It wants to be Chinese but doesn't like the Mainland Chinese. It wants to be international but doesn't like *gwailos*. As my late father would say, *what, man I say, do they want???* Hong Kong doesn't know what the hell it wants, which is why it does a little of this, a little of that and hates being criticized about *anything*. (Recently, a local film director received a less than favorable review of her new film and complained that the local media "should" support local filmmakers; while she may feel that way, as I do about local writing and how local media could be kinder to it, to expect critics, however misguided, to write what you want is called "P.R." not "criticism" – but as always, I digress). Hong Kong is not a nation state but has had a weird political and cultural history unlike any other place in the world. It never threw off its colonial overlords and subjected itself to being "handed over," like some chattel or possession, to the "Motherland." Do you wonder that the place is just a tiny bit confused?

What Hong Kong understands is money and understands it well.

Money is not literature. Money is stock markets, property, retirement accounts. Does that limit the readership of my work? Sure, because to engage in the stock market, property or retirement investments, you need to read Donald Trump and not Xu Xi. Do I mind? Well, if I *really* wanted to be Donald Trump, I would buy a lot of property, find a good looking Russian playboy to marry, and I wouldn't be Xu Xi.

C: I can see the potential in the development of and the growth in demand for Anglophone Hong Kong literature, but it seems to me that the society emphasizes on creating a Chinese Hong Kong identity and overlooks the emergence of a new generation of English speaking *wah kiu* whose parents migrated to US, Canada, Australia and Singapore in the 80s and 90s. What do you think will be the future development of Anglophone writing in Hong Kong?

X: Society can emphasize whatever it wants, but it is the *individual* who writes. If the ones drawn to creative output are the *wah kiu* (perhaps because they've been "polluted" but other cultures of the world that say, hey, it's okay to be mixed up now since more and more people are – note: that is a kind of "contaminated" culture and literature out there these days, and that's not necessarily a perjorative), then it doesn't matter a fig what society wants.

The real problem is whether or not Anglophone writers will want to be in Hong Kong. That is hard to say, because it will depend in part on how welcome they are (especially if some of these new generation *wah kiu* hold foreign passports or equally, find a more congenial literary society among *wah kiu* societies elsewhere).

Yet the point is, there is a small body of work already which new writers can add to and that is perhaps the most encouraging trend. To me, Hong Kong still offers a lot for a writer to examine, and as more creative writing is taught, the opportunity for writers to emerge is greater. However,

Anglophone literature will fade if the English language no longer has currency here. That could happen eventually. But it won't be terrible, because then there will be far more unambiguous space for Chinese Hong Kong literature, just as there is Chinese Shanghai or Beijing writing, which is really about city literature in any large nation. The time that Anglophone literature disappears into history is when Hong Kong really does become "just another Chinese city," (albeit with odd historical characteristics) which, I have to say, we just might be on our way to becoming.

C: Do you have any advice to give to the scholars who are interested in researching on this area?

X: Seems to me if scholars continue to pay attention to the Anglophone literature from this place, then there will be a record for the world. I do think the scholarly community has been a little slow in catching up, but then, I suppose, the writers first had to produce enough work to be discussed critically. It would be worthwhile for academics to create a space in the universities for local writers and their works, and not only for the teaching of creative writing (although that is not a bad start). If, for example, an English or American or Canadian university had a center for Hong Kong Anglophone literature, think of the energy it would draw in terms of writers and teachers and students.

But I'm not a scholar, just a writer. I leave that side of life to those who do it.

C:	Thank you very much. I hope we will meet very soon and I will be able to pay you a personal visit next time when I visit Hong Kong.

# APPENDIX THREE

## *The Perplexing Linguistic Identity of Hong Kong*

The three writers we study in this thesis mention more than once in their work, the tensions created by different languages and dialects in Hong Kong. Complexity of linguistic identity contributes in a large part, to the problematic cultural identity of Hong Kong. The Official Language Ordinance of 1974 giving Chinese theoretically equal status (please refer to p 148 footnote 112) allows us to glimpse the rivalry and lack of coordination between the colonial language English, and Chinese, the colonized language. As is mentioned in Chapter Three of this thesis, prior to Chinese being made one of the official languages of Hong Kong in 1974, English was the sole official language. Hong Kong had been transformed from a fishing village to an international financial centre during the 99 years of British colonial rule. As a result, colonial institutions especially like those of governmental administration, law and education were so firmly established and deeply rooted in Hong Kong that even the enforcement of the law of bilingualism has been unable to undo and eradicate English language's domination in the society. The situation has become especially peculiar and inexplicable after the handover. With the PRC's reclamation of sovereignty over Hong Kong, the Chinese language has changed from a colonised language to become the legitimate language used by the Chinese authority. A series of policies and reforms has been launched in the area of law and education with the intention to promote bilingualism and to replace English's domination by that of Chinese. Yet, none of them has fully succeeded. Due to the fact that English has long

been the symbol of elitism, the local government's promotion of "mother tongue education" has little support from the public. At the same time, since Hong Kong's legal system was built on the model of the British common law system and is incompatible with the PRC's civil law system, English remains the legally authoritative language under Chinese sovereignty.

However, the problematic language environment of Hong Kong is not simply the result of the British colonial legacy. On the one hand, English language plays a very important role in the governmental and intellectual spheres of the society, while, on the other hand, Chinese remains the primary means of communication at the communal level. Unlike other former British colonies such as Singapore and Malaysia, the adaptation of English in Hong Kong remains at a superficial level, and English has never become the first language of the majority of Hong Kong people either before or after the handover. Students are educated and trained to read and write in English in the classroom, yet they communicate in Cantonese outside the classroom. The same applies to workplace English. Instead of English, the Cantonese dialect is the lingua franca of the city. This situation makes the tension between Chinese and English languages even more intense.

At the same time, the use of Cantonese as the primary means of communication exacerbates the cultural difference between Hong Kong and the mainland. The Chinese language is a unique language system largely unfamiliar to the Western world. Chinese is a language with one written form but many dialects. Cantonese is amongst one of the many. Ethnic Chinese communities in places like Hong Kong, Singapore and

Malaysia are usually the descendents of migrants and refugees from various provinces of China in the past two centuries. Many of them were originally from the southern coastal region, and they speak dialects such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew and Hakka. While the mainland uses Putonghua (which means *common language*), and other Chinese ethnic communities outside mainland China Mandarin (from which Putonghua derives) as their lingua franca, Hong Kong people have, through the process of assimilation, come to speak Cantonese regardless of which place they were originally from. Hence, after the enforcement of bilingualism, the British colonial government as well as the Hong Kong SAR government have launched a series of campaigns to promote trilingualism (two written languages: Chinese and English, and three spoken languages/dialects: English, Cantonese and Putonghua) in school, media and workplace in order to facilitate a smooth transition of Hong Kong from British to Chinese rule. Yet Putonghua, even ten years after the handover, remains the major language barrier which intensifies the cultural gap between Hong Kong and mainland China. What is more, the split between the use of traditional Chinese characters in Hong Kong and simplified Chinese characters in the mainland further problematises the situation and makes Chinese cultural inaccessible to Hong Kong populace.

It seems that Hong Kong is entrapped in a peculiar and disadvantageous position. Colonial education and trilingual teaching have failed to produce a multilingual environment: on the contrary, most Hong Kong students face the problem of inability to write and read in fluent, formal Chinese, but are at the same time incapable of communicating in English outside the classroom context. Hong Kong is confronting an ironic

reality in which young people are taught in three languages/dialects but fail to master any of them. The by-product of this linguistic perplexity is the emergence of Chin-glish which is similar to the famous Singlish of Singapore. While Singlish is a mixture of Hokkien, Mandarin and English, Chin-glish in Hong Kong is a local dialect combining Cantonese with English.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY


## *Primary Sources*

Ho, Louise. *Local Habitation* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1994).

Ho, Louise. *New Ends Old Beginnings* (Hong Kong: Asia 2000, 1997).

Ho. Louise. "Hong Kong Writing and Writing Hong Kong", n *Asian Englishes Today: Hong Kong English Autonomy and Creativity*, ed. Kingsley Bolton (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2000), 173-82.

Ho, Louise. "Foreword", in *City Voices: Hong Kong Writing in English 1945 to the Present* ed. Xu Xi & Mike Ingham (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), xiii-ix.

Lam, Agnes. *Woman to Woman and Other Poems* (Hong Kong: Asia 2000, 1997).

Lam, Agnes. "Defining Hong Kong Poetry in English: An answer from linguistics" in *Hong Kong English: Autonomy and Creativity*, ed. Kingsley Bolton (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press 2000) 183-95.

Lam, Agnes. *Water Wood Pure Splendour* (Hong Kong: Asia 2000, 2001).

Xu Xi (Chako, Sussy). "Wah Kiu Wanderers", in *Asia Magazine*, March 24-26, 1995: Volume 33, K-12.

Xu Xi. *Hong Kong Rose* (Hong Kong: Asia 2000, 1997).

Xu Xi. "Writing the Literature of Non-denial", in *Asian Englishes Today: Hong Kong English Autonomy and Creativity*, ed. Kingsley Bolton (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press 2000), 219-37.

Xu Xi. *Chinese Walls* (1994) (Hong Kong: Chameleon Press, 2000).

Xu Xi, *Overleaf Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Chameleon Press, 2004).

Xu Xi. *History's Fiction: Stories from the City of Hong Kong*, (Hong Kong: Chameleon Press, 2005).

## *Secondary Texts*

Abbas, Ackbar. *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997).

Abrams, M.H. (ed.) *The Norton anthology of English literature*, Vol.2 (Norton, 1986).

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and*

*spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

Ashcroft, Bill. *The Empire Writes Back: theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989).

Barker, Francis. *Colonial Discourse, Postcolonial Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

Banton, Michael. *Ethnic and Racial Consciousness* (London: Longman, 1997).

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture: critical theory and the postcolonial perspective* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1991).

Bhabha, Homi K (ed.). *Nation and Narration* (London : Routledge, 1990).

Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Bolton, Kingsley (ed.). *Asian Englishes Today: Hong Kong English Autonomy and Creativity* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press 2000).

Chow, Rey. *Writing Diaspora: tactics of intervention in contemporary cultural studies* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, c1993).

Chow, Rey. *Ethics after Idealism : theory, culture, ethnicity, reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature and art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism,* ed. Paul B. Armstrong (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 2005).

Chase, Malcolm and Christopher Shaw. *Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (UK: Manchester University Press, 1989).

de Man, Paul. *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

D'Haen Theo (ed.). *(Un)writing Empire* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998).

Djebar, Assia. "Writing in the Language of the Other", in *The Translingual Imagination,* ed. Steven G. Kellman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 19-27.

Doane, Janice L. *Nostalgia and Sexual Difference: the resistance to contemporary feminism* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

Dwyer, Rachel *Filming the gods: religion and Indian cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Eliot, Thomas Stearns. *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber,

2004).

Feldman, Yael S. "Postcolonial Memory, Postmodern Intertextuality: Anton Shammas's Arabesques Revisited", in *PMLA*, Vol. 114, No. 3 (1999), 373-89.

Fitzgerald, John. "The Nationaless State: the Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese Nationalism", in *The Australian Journals of Chinese Affairs*, No. 33 (1995), 75-104.

Guha, Ranajit. *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson. 'Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference', in *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 7 (1992), no. 1, 6-23.

Hallward, Peter. *Absolutely Postcolonial: writing between the singular and the specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

Hogan, Patrick Colm. *Colonialism and Cultural Identity: Crises of Tradition in the Anglophone Literatures of India, Africa and the Caribbean* (New York: State University of New York Press 2000).

Hsia, Joyce and T.C.Lai (ed.) *Images on Shifting Water* (Hong Kong, 1977).

*Huang, Biyun (Wong Bik Wan). *The Portray of Virtuous Ladies (Lie nü tu)* (Hong Kong: Cosmos Book Press, 1999).

Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic: marketing the margins* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Ingham, Michael and Xu Xi (eds.). *City Voices: An Anthology of Hong Kong Writing in English* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003).

Ingham, Michael. *Hong Kong: a cultural history* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Jameson, Fredric. "Preface" in *The Cultures of Globalization,* ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi Durham (N.C : Duke University Press, 1998).

Karmel, Solomon M. "Ethnic Tension and the Struggle for Order: China's policies in Tibet" in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 68, No.4 (Winter, 1995-6), 485-508.

Kenny, Judith T. "Climate, Race and Imperial Authority: the symbolic landscape of British Hill Station in India", in *Annals of Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (Dec., 1995), 694-714.

Kingston, Maxine Hong (1977) *The Woman Warrior: memoirs of a*

*girlhood among ghosts* (London: Pan, 1995).

Landry, Donna and Gerald MacLean (ed.). *The Spivak Reader: selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (New York; London: Routledge, 1996).

Lau Siu-kai, "Social Change, Bureaucratic Rule, and Emergent Political Issues in Hong Kong", 545 in *World Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Jul. 1983), 544-562.

Lau Siu-kai, "Institutions Without Leaders: The Hong Kong Chinese View of Political Leadership" 191-2 in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 63, NO.2 (Summer, 1990), 191-209.

Leonard, Philip. *Nationality between Poststructuralism and Postcolonial Theory: a new cosmopolitanism* (Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998).

McLeod, A.L. (ed.). *The Commonwealth Pen: An Introduction to the Literature of the British Commonwealth* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1961).

McLeod, John. *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

McNeil, William H. *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed forces and Society Since 1000 AD* (University Of Chicago Press, 1984).

Mohanram, Radhika. *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

Nash, Manning. *The Caldron of Ethnicity in the Modern World* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

Nkrumah, Kwame. *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Heinemann, 1968).

Punter, David. *Postcolonial Imaginings: fictions of a new world order* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

Quayson, Ato. *Postcolonialism: theory, practice, or process?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

Ritivoi, Andreea Deciu. *Yesterday's Self: nostalgia and the immigrant identity* (Lanham, Md.; Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, c2002).

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism* (1978) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994).

Said, Edward W. "Invention, Memory, and Place" in *Critical Inquiry* 26, Winter (2000), 175-92.

Skinner, John. *The Stepmother Tongue: an introduction to new Anglophone*

*fiction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: toward a history of the vanishing present* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 2001).

Tam, Kwok Kan, Timothy Weiss (ed.). *English and Globalization: Perspective from Hong Kong and Mainland China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, c2004).

Thumboo, Edwin "Notes on a Sense of History". in *The Writer's Sense of the Past*, ed. Kirpal Singh (NUS: Singapore University Press, 1987), 223-33.

Walder, Dennis. *Post-colonial Literatures in English: history, language, theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

Yeats, W.B. *Poems of W.B. Yeats: a new selection selected* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988).

Young, Robert. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

Zhang, Benzi. "Re-Siting the Global/Re-Sighting the Local" in *Sights of Contestation: localism, globalism and cultural production in Asia and the Pacific,* ed. Kwok-kan Tam, Wimal Dissannayake and Terry Siu-han Yip (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2002), 35-56.

***黃碧雲 (1999)** 《烈女圖》Xianggang: Tian di tu shu you xian gong si. (香港 : 天地圖書有限公司, 1999).