Writing Hong Kong Sinophonicity : history, gender and ethnicity in Hong Kong fiction

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**Writing Hong Kong Sinophonicity — History, Gender and
Ethnicity in Hong Kong Fiction**

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SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
2018**

**Writing Hong Kong Sinophonicity — History, Gender and
Ethnicity in Hong Kong Fiction**

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School of Humanities

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2018

Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research, is free of plagiarised materials, and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

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Date

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Assoc. Professor Sim Wai Chew

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Summary

The fact that Hong Kong has a long literary tradition is often neglected in much of the public discussion about the city's political and economic situation. The marginal place that literature occupies subsequently inspires writers to approach Hong Kong's colonial formation in an alternative light, one that can be understood as an act of decolonization of Hong Kong's culture. This dissertation therefore argues for a conceptualization of Sinophonicity that depicts the formation of the local Hong Kong subject as constructed in literary fiction, in order to articulate how Hong Kong literature produces decolonizing discourse and pressures. Deriving from the discourse of Sinophone studies, the term "Sinophonicity" differentiates from the monological signifier "Chineseness" by putting an emphasis on the diverse cultural practices of Sinitic language-speaking communities, including Han communities on the Chinese mainland. In unfolding its meaning, I locate three aspects that are most pertinent to articulating the relationship between Hong Kong's colonial formation and its literature—namely, history, gender, and ethnicity. So far, no thesis written in English or Chinese within Hong Kong and beyond has adopted such a theoretical tool to analyze Hong Kong literature. Thus, my dissertation will be structured in accordance with these three aspects, in the hopes of shedding new light on the complex historical formation of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture.

Chapter one sets out with a historical inquiry into the processes of identity formation in Hong Kong from the perspective of historiography in Dung Kai-cheung's *Works and Creation: Vivid and Lifelike* (2005). By analyzing Dung's construction of a personalized history of artifacts, the chapter argues for a notion of historical Sinophonicity that questions prevailing models of identity formation in official historical discourse. Chapter two expands the purview of the historical inquiry in chapter one with its discussion of the notion of gendered Sinophonicity

that is constructed in Wong Bik-wan's *Portraits of Martyred Women* (1999) and *Children of Darkness* (2013). The chapter focuses on Wong's construction of oral histories as a means to write against the hegemonic representations of womanhood and manhood in a Chinese cultural context. Chapter three then introduces a notion of ethnic Sinophonicity to the discussion by reading Xu Xi's *Hong Kong Rose* (1997) and *The Unwalled City* (2001), with the aim of making the hidden problems of ethnic relations visible in Hong Kong society. Such an analysis also forms a useful comparison with the previous two chapters, thus deepening our understanding of the intersectionality of class, gender and ethnicity on identity formation. Collectively, the conceptualization of Sinophonicity in the three chapters attests to the medium of literary fiction as an effective site for producing decolonizing impetus, in order to better position Hong Kong in post-handover years.

Notes on Transliteration

Throughout this dissertation, the romanization of the Chinese names of the scholars cited is in accordance with the transliteration convention of the place where these scholars are based. For instance, the names of Hong Kong scholars are transliterated in Cantonese while those of mainland scholars are written in pinyin. The Chinese characters of these names are presented most of the time according to their availability in existing Chinese-language publications. At the same time, they only appear when the names are mentioned for the first time, following the English transliteration. For specific terms, the Chinese characters are then added with brief explanations in English. Next, regarding the names of the fictional characters in the novels under discussion, pinyin transliteration is used. Lastly, concerning the citation of Chinese-language works, the titles are cited in the sequence that a pinyin transliteration is first introduced, which is then followed by an English translation done by myself.

Introduction

Popular opinion regarding Hong Kong literature often dwells on the rhetoric that it is a cultural dessert, only producing lowbrow popular writings devoid of any literary merit. Such rhetoric became a sweeping discourse used to examine all cultural activities from writing to printing, despite the wide circulation of Hong Kong films in East/Southeast Asian and North American societies. In order to rebut this literary discourse, local scholars such as Lo Wai-luen [盧瑋鑾], Wong Kai-chee [黃繼持], and William Tay [鄭樹森]¹ have enlisted astounding facts, case studies, and analytical research to trace the long literary tradition in Hong Kong that can at least date back to the period of the May Fourth movement.² Many important literary activities or works produced in Hong Kong by famous writers have since been unearthed, such as Xiao Hong [蕭紅], Lu Xun [魯迅] and Mao Dun [茅盾]. Although these writers are likely to have come to the city first with the purpose of sojourn or further migration to Taiwan, Southeast Asia and the United States, their works form part of Hong Kong's literary history.

Nevertheless, Hong Kong literature is still seen as inferior vis-à-vis literary production on the mainland. The primary reason is arguably the city's periphery political stance due to its

¹ Lo, Wai-luen. *Xianggang de Youyu: Wenren Bixia de Xianggang (1925-1941)* [*The Melancholia of Hong Kong: Hong Kong under the Pen of Literary Writers (1925-1941)*]. Hong Kong: Huafeng Publishing House, 1983. Wong, Kai-chee. *Xianggang Wenxue Chutan* [*A First Probe into Hong Kong Literature*]. Hong Kong: Wah Hon Publishing Co., 1985. Wong, Kai-chee, Lo Wai-luen and William Tay. *Zhuiji Xianggang Wenxue* [*In Search of Hong Kong Literature*]. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1998. Tay, William, Wong Kai-chee and Lo Wai-luen, ed. *Zaoqi Xianggang Xin Wenxue Ziliao Xuan: 1927-1941* [*Selected Works of Early New Literature in Hong Kong: 1927-1941*]. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books Ltd., 1998.

² The surge of academic efforts to write a literary history of Hong Kong only occurred in the 1990s when many publishing houses in mainland China produced a sizable amount of Hong Kong's literary histories within the context of the 1997 handover. Although many Hong Kong scholars such as Wong Wang-chi have criticized the nationalistic underpinning of these histories (W. C. Wong 113), these works of literary history nevertheless provide a useful documentary of the literary practices in Hong Kong at the beginning of the twentieth century. Such a premise of the timeline of Hong Kong's literary history on the May Fourth movement is also echoed in the recent local publication of the series of *Xianggang Wenxue Daxi: 1919-1949* [*Compendium of Hong Kong Literature 1919-1949*; 2014]. As the series editor Leonard Chan Kwok-kou notes, the May Fourth movement "was one of the major sources that prompted the transformation of Hong Kong's modern culture" (K. K. Chan 22; my translation). According to Chan, the exact starting year of Hong Kong's literary practice may vary because old texts are continually being unearthed to broaden our horizon of history. Nonetheless, the framework of "May Fourth" still provides a pertinent context within which we can better understand the literary practices in Hong Kong at earlier times.

colonial past. This is not to say that all literature is nationalistic; but rather, Hong Kong's political complexity breeds a body of literary works that cannot be simply grouped into the rubric of national literature. Linguistically speaking, the Chinese language used in literary writing has long been viewed as non-standard Chinese. Full of English register and a mixture of hybrid terms, Hong Kong literature is easily pushed to the side when compared with the more orthodox form of literary writing on the mainland.³ Furthermore, despite a surge of academic commitment to characterizing Hong Kong literature as part of the national literature in the wake of the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, the scale of essays, reviews and scholarly volumes on this subject matter is relatively small, and to some extent inadequate. This is largely due to the reduction of Hong Kong's history into a simplistic narrative in official discourse on the mainland,⁴ whereby Hong Kong is returning to the embrace of the motherland after more than one-hundred-year's colonization. As such, Hong Kong literature seems to always bear a negative connotation of being "contaminated" by the colonial forces.

The calling out the marginal status of Hong Kong literature is to show the extent to which

³ Leo Ou-fan Lee [李歐梵] in an article "Xianggang Wenhua De 'Bianyuan Xing' Chutan" ["A cursory investigation of the 'Marginality' of Hong Kong Culture"] discusses persuasively on the subject matter of why Hong Kong culture is deemed marginal compared to the mainland. In it, Lee lists two main reasons: first of all, literary discourse on Hong Kong usually appears as an appendix to literary depiction of Shanghai. Lee especially cites the example of Eileen Chang's novels in which Hong Kong is described as a place in passing and an exotic location for a getaway from Shanghai. In comparison with Shanghai's semi-colonized situation, Hong Kong's full colony status renders it a periphery site in literature. The second reason that Lee raises is the attitudes of the May Fourth intellectuals held towards Hong Kong. Lee notes that it is oftentimes regarded as a given concerning Hong Kong's marginal status vis-à-vis the political and cultural centers (Beijing and Shanghai) on the mainland. Even when those intellectuals relocated in Hong Kong in the immediate post-Second World War years, their writing still conveys a sense of mainland-centrism that renders the city invisible. This view of seeing Hong Kong as a periphery to the mainland center has somewhat maintained its vitality throughout the years into the late 1990s. For a more detailed account, please see Lee, Ou-fan Leo. *In Search of Hong Kong Culture*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2002. 169-81.

⁴ In the *Fouxian Xianggang* [Hong Kong Unimagined], Wong Wang-chi, Li Siu-leung and Stephen Chan Ching-kiu devote a chapter to the topic of the writing of Hong Kong literary history by mainland scholars. In the said chapter (W. C. Wong 95-132), the authors list several pioneering works produced by prestigious scholars since the late 1980s and use them as examples to show how literary histories produced by these scholars have overt nationalistic underpinning. This is largely due to their view of literature as subjugated to the greater narrative of nationalism. As such, when the scholars include Hong Kong literature as a part of the national literature, the narration generated in their books sees Hong Kong literature as an effect of mainland Chinese cultural influences, thus ignoring the colonial specificities which gave rise to Hong Kong literature.

its historical formation is left unattended in both the academic and public cultural discourses. In particular such neglect is liable to promote or reinforce the nationalistic ideology enshrined in the overarching category of “Chinese literature.” It is the aim of this dissertation, accordingly, to counter such a disposition by drawing close attention to the complex formation of Hong Kong literature. As literary writing in Hong Kong is tightly linked to the development of its urban space, any analysis eventually boils down to how we understand the relationship between Hong Kong literature and colonialism. However, colonialism in Hong Kong has its particularities, such that any reference to existing postcolonial theories cannot fully articulate the intricacy of Hong Kong’s coloniality. The most salient feature of this coloniality is, I contend, Hong Kong’s connection with mainland China—geographically, historically, socially, ethnically, politically and culturally—which then adds a new dimension of complexity different from the situations in other British colonies, such as India. In literary discourse, such complex coloniality can be illustrated through the examples of *nanlai zuojia* [南來作家; Southbound writers]⁵. Southbound writers were the major contributors to the establishments of literary magazines, supplements and other publishing media in Hong Kong. As these southbound writers in Hong Kong maintain different affective ties with the Chinese mainland, their writing reflects an array of subject positions regarding the relationship between an individual and the city of Hong Kong.⁶ These

⁵ The term refers to writers who came from mainland China to Hong Kong as early as in the late nineteenth century to seek political refuge such as Wang Tao [王韜]. The tidal influx is also seen in the early twentieth century: some would come only to avoid the harsh living conditions on the mainland due to political instability while others saw Hong Kong as a relatively prosperous place to set foot under the governance of the British colonial administration. A wonderful discussion of the term can be found in Lo Wai-luen’s essay “‘Nanlai Zuojia’ Qianshuo” [“A Cursory Discussion of ‘Southbound Writers’”] in *In Search of Hong Kong Literature* (113-30). In the essay, Lo points out the generational differences among the southbound writers when they came to Hong Kong at different historical junctures. As a result, they take on different attitudes toward the city of Hong Kong, which are reflected in their literary orientations.

⁶ A useful comparison is between Sima Changfeng [司馬長風] and Liu Yi-chang [劉以鬯] whereby the former’s prose writing is often infused with a sense of nostalgia for the lost homeland and the latter chooses to take the city of Hong Kong as his object (W. L. Lo, “A Cursory Discussion” 115-19). Another example would be Ye Ling-feng [葉

subject positions, in turn, showcase the extent to which the literary practices of the southbound writers are either impeded or facilitated by the conditions of colonial governance in Hong Kong.⁷

The example of southbound writers thus points to the varying degrees of divergence of literary practices in Hong Kong from those in mainland China. As younger generations of local-born writers began to take part in literary production from the 1970s onwards, their writing, whether Cantonese-inflected or not, delineated an increasingly culturally specific response to the changing social conditions of colonial Hong Kong.⁸ As such, despite a shared written script standard between Hong Kong and the mainland, Hong Kong literature cannot be simply subsumed under the totalizing category of modern Chinese literature that has overtly nationalistic ideological underpinning. Instead, Hong Kong literature should be understood within the context of Western imperialism, Chinese nationalism⁹ and rising localism¹⁰.

Moreover, the historical specificity of Hong Kong literature also manifests in the development of local English-language writings about the city.¹¹ In this regard, the complexity of

靈鳳] who rarely puts Hong Kong into his fiction writing but writes profusely about the city's history in other forms of writing (122).

⁷ A detailed discussion can be found in William Tay's essay "Colonialism, the Cold War Era, and Marginal Space: The Existential Conditions of Four Decades of Hong Kong Literature" in *Chinese Literature in the Second Half of a Modern Century: A Critical Survey* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000, 31-38).

⁸ It is generally acknowledged that the 1970s saw the emergence of an awareness of local identity, as Hong Kong underwent rapid industrialization. The legislation of Chinese as one of the official languages also occurred during this time period. A more detailed account can be found in Lui Tai-lok's book *Na Siceng Xiangshi De Qishi Niandai* [*The Story of Hong Kong in the 1970s Retold*; Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Books, 2012].

⁹ Chinese nationalism is not necessarily confined to the ideological agenda of the PRC government, although this is largely correct in post-handover Hong Kong society. Nonetheless, the term also includes the nostalgia for a cultural "China" as delineated by many southbound writers, which denotes an adherence to Chinese cultural values, mainly of Han ethnicity, but not so much as a political or national allegiance to the PRC. A discussion of such a view can be found in Chan Hok-yin's book *Wusi zai Xianggang* [*May Fourth in Hong Kong*; Hong Kong: Zhonghua Bookstore, 2014] where Chan traces the changing perception of Chinese nationalism in Hong Kong within the framework of the "May Fourth" cultural ideology.

¹⁰ By localism, I mean not only the recent fervent nativist political sentiment after the 1997-handover that advocates a total dismissal of Hong Kong's historical connection to mainland China. Localism here also includes a series of grounded, and progressive-thinking modes of cultural discourse with the purpose of obtaining a differentiated sense of local identity. These two strands of localist thinking are constantly in dialogue with each other as well as with Chinese nationalistic and colonial ideologies.

¹¹ Starting from the 1990s, there was a surge of English literary publications that attended to a local cultural sensitivity. Works done by Xu Xi, Louise Ho, Tammy Ho, Jennifer Wong, Kit Fan, Sarah Howe, and so forth have

Hong Kong literature finds resonance in the status of languages in Hong Kong—Cantonese is the speaking language of the majority population, who mostly write in standard Chinese script in an environment where English is a symbol of privilege and power. Regarding such a complex condition, Rey Chow [周蕾] has astutely put that Hong Kong is “between two colonizers,”¹² namely Britain and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Chow’s argument for the first time introduced the particular formation of Hong Kong’s coloniality to the international audience. However, such a way of approaching Hong Kong’s coloniality can easily lead to a dichotomous thinking of Hong Kong-versus-mainland China, thus rendering the nuances of Hong Kong’s historical connection with mainland China negligible. It is in this way that postcolonial theories such as Rey Chow’s term “postcolonial anomaly” fail to offer a framework that effectively explains the relationship between Hong Kong’s coloniality and literature.

As Shih Shu-mei [史書美] notes, “[w]hat the ambiguous state of colonialism in Hong Kong today after a long history of formal colonialism suggests is that the project of Hong Kong literature is predetermined not to document postcoloniality but to articulate and struggle for *decolonization*” (Shih, “Hong Kong Literature” 17; italics original). Shih’s argument about the “predetermination” in a way foregrounds an imperative to study Hong Kong literature in relation to the decolonization of Hong Kong. Her words then subtly highlight the critical capacity of literature to offer new insight into the intricacies of Hong Kong culture. In view of this, this dissertation proposes a conceptualization of Sinophonicity in examining literary representation, particularly in fiction, of Hong Kong’s coloniality as part of the wider, ongoing effort of cultural

all provided new literary aesthetics for readers to think of the city anew. In the meantime, there were writers who produced bilingual works, such as Leung Ping-kwan [梁秉鈞], that lead us to contemplate more on the issues of translation, inter-culturalism and transculturation. More importantly, these works have crossed the conventional boundaries concerning who should be considered as local and what criteria should be raised to define Hong Kong literature.

¹² Chow, Rey. “Between Colonizers: Hong Kong’s Postcolonial Self-Writing in the 1990s.” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 2.2 (1992): 151-70.

decolonization in the city.

1. Defining Sinophonicity: Literary Representation of Hong Kong's Coloniality

In her book *Visuality and Identity* (2007), Shih Shu-mei calls to mind the usefulness of conceptual frameworks such as Francophone in describing the multifarious effect of colonialism on the colonized people. She then draws a parallel between the socio-cultural context of former French colonies and that of Sinitic language-speaking communities, which leads to her promotion of Sinophone studies. Deriving from the term “Sinophone,” the concept of Sinophonicity is defined as the formation of the local subject born of processes of localization among various cultural influences that occur within Hong Kong's Sinophone space. It primarily directs its critical attention to literary representation of the varied relationships between individual Hong Kong people and their living space. The introduction of this term is to counter the prevalent use of the term “Chineseness” to designate the cultural identity of individual Hong Kongers. Similar to the problematic category of modern Chinese literature, the term “Chineseness,” when used to depict the cultural identities of ethnic Chinese outside mainland China, often reduces these people into a singular Chinese ethnicity.¹³ In literary discourse, this results in the establishment of the category of overseas Chinese literature through a conflation of language [the standard Chinese script] with ethnicity [Chinese]. Such a conflation is facilitated by the fact that the academic discourses in both mainland China and North America have generated, purposely or inadvertently, an essentialized notion of Chineseness as Han culture.¹⁴

¹³ Although scholars such as Ien Ang have argued for the plural form of the term, namely “Chinesenesses,” this perspective of cultural pluralism does not change the use of Chinese as a homogenizing ethnic or even racial marker to impose on people who are ethnically non-Han or speak other Sinitic languages other than Mandarin.

¹⁴ Xu, Ben. “‘From Modernity to Chineseness’: The Rise of Nativist Cultural Theory in Post-1989 China.” *Positions: Asia Critique* 6.1 (1998): 203-37. Chow, Rey. “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem.” *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*. Ed. Rey Chow. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998. 1-24. In addition, a useful example can be found in a radio program broadcast about one of the most prominent local writers in Hong Kong, Dung Kai-cheung. The program reveals the difficulty of publishing the English translation of one of Dung's novels in the United States, due to the fact that Hong Kong

By contrast, the emergence of Sinophone studies in the last decade has introduced a new critical lens through which the value-laden word “Chinese” is replaced with the phrase “Sinitic languages and communities.” As a result, the Sinophone lens diverts our attention away from the monological thinking of Chineseness to the polyphonic, multivalent understanding of Sinophonicity.

Although deriving from the discourse of Sinophone studies, Sinophonicity here differentiates from Shih’s argument in one major aspect. As she writes, “Sinophone studies takes as its objects of study the Sinitic-language communities and cultures outside China as well as ethnic minority communities and cultures within China where Mandarin is adopted or imposed” (Shih, “Introduction” 11). Shih’s definition of Sinophone is then constructed on three pillars, namely language, ethnicity and geographical/territorial entity. However, the three pillars are not equally weighed in her consideration of the concept. When discussing cultural communities outside mainland China, only the dimension of language takes prominence in understanding the term “Sinophone.” In contrast, when discussing cultural communities on the mainland, Sinophone is constructed through a conflation of language [non-Mandarin] with ethnicity [ethnic minorities]. This kind of conflation subsequently sets up a natural link between Mandarin the language and Han ethnicities in mainland China. Such a link is decidedly inaccurate, as the formation of Han culture also involves a complex process of localization among different non-Han cultural influences. This fact is noted by Ge Zhao-guang [葛兆光] who has conducted an insightful investigation of the historicity of what “China” and “Chinese culture” entails in his book *What is China?: Territory, Ethnicity, Culture, and History* (2014). In the book, Ge delineates how the formation of Han cultural values has gone through several stages of

literature is considered non-existent by the local publishers (“The Rose of the Name—Writing Hong Kong.” *Wenyi Gangtai*. RTHK. Hong Kong, 16 Dec. 2014. Radio).

transformation with the rise and fall of different dynasties. At the same time, Han culture constantly interacts with and is influenced by cultures of other ethnicities, which should be differentiated from the Confucian-based cultural values propagandized in today's official discourse (Ge 95-121). Mandarin, as a northern dialect historically and now a national language, is thus only a discursive construct. It fails to fully convey the linguistic landscape drawn by diverse groups of dialect-speaking Han communities.

From this consideration, if the notion of *Sino* [China; Chinese]-*phone* [language] is to achieve its full critical potential, I argue that the consideration of Sinophone for any Sinitic-language communities should contain an equal evaluation of the dimensions of language, ethnicity and geographical and political entity. This equal evaluation subsequently can broaden our understanding of what Sinophone culture of a place truly entails.

This extended definition of Sinophone culture then constitutes the premise of Sinophonicity discussed in this dissertation. To return to the case of Hong Kong literature, a notion of Sinophonicity that pays attention to the intersectionality of language and ethnicity is necessary to understand the historical conditions under which these writings are produced. As an immigrant city, Hong Kong has historically gathered migrants from different countries, regions and provinces inside mainland China. While Cantonese is deemed the mother tongue of its local people, the linguistic demographics within the city are in actuality quite diverse and complex. In some cases, people who fled mainland China due to political turmoil only acquired the Cantonese language after settling in Hong Kong. To cite the example of southbound writers, the most representative figure is the late writer Liu Yi-chang. Heralded as the father of modernist literature in Hong Kong, Liu was born in Shanghai and moved to Hong Kong only at the age of 30. Although his writings are shrewd critiques of Hong Kong's urban ecology, I contend that his

linguistic background, which in many ways affects one's ethnic belonging, should influence our thinking about what Sinophone culture exactly entails in Hong Kong. For instance, in his novel *Duidao* [*Intersection*; 1975], he describes two subject positions against the background of economically prosperous Hong Kong—one is an immigrant man from Shanghai and the other a local born teenage girl. Taking the lens of Sinophonicity, we may argue how the linguistic traits of the two characters described by Liu lead to two different understandings of ethnic cultural identity in Hong Kong. Moreover, a further consideration of gender in analyzing their expressions of Sinophonicity can potentially yield more nuanced understanding of the broader socio-cultural conditions within 1970s colonial Hong Kong. In this fashion, Hong Kong's Sinophone cultural space is shown through multilayered power dynamics.

An extended horizon of Sinophone culture can also be obtained from analyses of English-language works under the framework of Sinophonicity. Given Hong Kong's colonial status, English-language writings have historically been produced by white Euro-American expatriates or sojourners. This is not to say that there exist no English language works done by local-born ethnic Chinese writers. What deserves our attention in studying these local English language writers is that their writing faces a new level of marginalization by the majority Chinese writings in the city, in addition to the colonialist writings by Euro-American writers. The lens of Sinophonicity can help to address such an aspect through a consideration of the minor-major dynamics in terms of ethnicity and language. As Lo Kwai-cheung [羅貴祥] insightfully argues,

local literary writers have to confront a problematic relationship between major and minor languages: Cantonese, a dialect and a vernacular language, is used at home and in the local community; English, a colonial, governmental language, is used for commerce and constitutes a repressive and dominating instrument for the

colonized Hong Kong Chinese; Mandarin, which plays the role of cultural reference, entails a literary boundary and models a standardized Chinese. (K. C. Lo 142)

Lo's argument, first of all, reiterates my earlier analysis of Hong Kong's coloniality through the issue of language. More importantly, his view of the dichotomous major/minor languages brings to mind the notion of "minor literature" proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

According to them, "[a] minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language... in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (Deleuze & Guattari 16). At the first level, calling Hong Kong literature a minor literature is different than Lo's dichotomy of minor/major languages. The categorization of minor literature subjects Hong Kong literature to the totality of Chinese literature on the mainland. Nevertheless, Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the deterritorialization of language provides a useful entry point. My contention is that minor literature derives its political agency, first and foremost, from its material aspect of writing. In the case of Hong Kong literature, when the standard Chinese script is used to describe a Cantonese sensibility, Mandarin's role of "cultural reference" can be subverted through the experimentation of form and narrative style of a literary work written in English. More importantly, if we take into account the factor of those English-language writers' not-all-ethnic-Han background, the dichotomy of minor/major languages or literature will be easily dismantled.

The strategy of deterritorialization in a way illustrates the appeal of using Sinophonicity to assess literary representation of Hong Kong's coloniality. As Jing Tsu notes, Sinophone is "first and foremost a problem of sound and script... [concerning] facets of the history and materiality of writing" (Tsu 14). To return to English writings by local writers in Hong Kong,

using the lens of Sinophonicity not only puts focus on their language and content, but also highlights the ethnic backgrounds and cultural affiliations of the writers who produce them. In other words, the process of negotiation of language conventions that necessarily takes place between different cultural influences is enshrined in the definition of Sinophonicity. It is in this way that Sinophonicity sees English as a major language which is capable of being reterritorialized as a contributing medium through which local experience is voiced.

This foregrounding of language and ethnicity through the lens of Sinophonicity is ultimately to address the historicity of Hong Kong literature, and by extension of Hong Kong's coloniality. By doing so, Sinophonicity further gives way to a less antagonistic or nationalistic view of Hong Kong's historical connection with mainland China. As mentioned earlier, Hong Kong literature is situated within the context of Western imperialism, Chinese nationalism and localism. In my discussion of an extended horizon of Hong Kong Sinophone culture, Hong Kong's cultural ties with mainland China can be viewed from a more fluid perspective. In other words, the term "Sinophone" should be understood as including the cultural practices of ethnic Han Chinese communities in mainland China.

David Der-wei Wang [王德威] helpfully notes that "if *huayu* [華語; Sinitic languages] is multivocal, fluid and hybridized, Sinophone literature then needs to go above the categorical bounds of nation-states, ethnicities and even social stratification" (Wang, *Sinophone* 5; my translation). Underlying Wang's claim is arguably a desire to use the Sinophone lens as a restructuring force to resist the prevalence of taking mainland Chinese culture as the sole object of academic inquiries in Chinese studies. This more inclusive view of Sinophone literature means granting an equal distribution of intellectual attention to all Sinitic-language communities, including the Han Chinese communities on the mainland. My thinking is in line with Wang's

viewpoint. Cultural production on the mainland historically involves far too complex a process of formation. This level of complexity cannot be simply ignored, but instead is likely to become a useful reference point when discussing other Sinitic cultural practice, such as in Hong Kong.

In many ways, Shih's definition bears the same ideological underpinning as Wang's, that is, a resistance to the essentializing of Chinese studies in academic discourse. Her exclusion of mainland Han Chinese in her definition only points to her critical stance on the cultural ideology propagandized by official mainland institutions. Granted, such cultural ideology is predicated on an essentializing mechanism of promoting an "authentic" Chinese culture, one which is basically anti-West. As Ben Xu astutely points out, this "nativist" cultural ideology "mixes xenophobia, polemical rhetoric, and nationalist sentiment into a defiant third-world or postcolonial stance confronting Western cultural hegemony" (B. Xu 204). Moreover, the promotion of such a cultural policy also aims at other Sinitic-language communities outside the mainland. Playing on the notion of nostalgia for the original homeland, the policy attempts to foster cultural allegiance of people of Chinese descent through a "logic of the wound," to borrow Rey Chow's phrase (Chow, "Introduction" 6). This "logic of the wound" asserts a perpetuation of the state of diaspora for the people and communities outside the mainland. On the basis of this consideration, Shih's exclusivist definition of Sinophone gains purchase when cultural production by mainland Han communities is in service of the nationalistic ideology. It stands as a theoretical stronghold against subjugation by the nativist cultural policy operating on the mainland.

Nonetheless, Sinophonicity remains skeptical of the exclusivist view in Shih's definition. This can be explained through the example of Taiwan's Sinophone cultural formation. Taiwan has been vying for the central place in producing the knowledge on Chineseness arguably since the founding of the PRC. If Sinophone studies include Taiwan, there is no reason to exclude

mainland Han Chinese communities. To expand this point, I cite David Wang's analysis of "loyalist" and "postloyalist" thinking in Taiwan literature. According to Wang, "the loyalist originally indicated a political subject out of touch with his times. As a mourner of a past polity and culture, the term loyalist derives meaning from the crumbling margins of legitimacy and subjectivity" (Wang, "Postloyalism" 101). The loyalist thinking in Taiwan literature is often manifested as a longing for an image of cultural China, which is politically different from the image of communist China. However, in more recent times, there emerged another line of thinking in Taiwan literature called, in Wang's term, postloyalist thinking. As Wang notes, "If a previous dynasty or polity did not exist, the logic of the post-loyalist is still able to fabricate one, creating an affinity to a historical—nay, desired—object that he seeks to recover or restore" (102). The creation of an imagined past enshrined in postloyalist thinking then allows room for alternative political futures to the homogenizing one propounded by loyalist thinking. In a fashion similar to that of mainland China, postloyalist thinking attest to Taiwan's Sinophone space as a viable site for producing heterogeneous cultural ideologies that contest monolithic understanding of Chineseness.

Sinophonicity thus recognizes both Taiwan and mainland China as sites engendering polyphonic, multidimensional articulations of Chinese cultural practices, all of which should be critically assessed. In this way, Sinophonicity is pluralistic in nature, refusing to be subsumed under any single homogenizing category or precept. The inclusion of mainland Han Chinese communities further undercuts the preference for politically informed content over the aesthetic appeals of cultural productions. Literary works by mainland Han Chinese writers are not necessarily in service of an oppressive state ideology. Many provide valuable discourses and critical insights into the social structure of the PRC. Under the framework of Sinophonicity,

these works can be seen as participating in a dialogue with works produced in other places. As they all bear the cultural or ideological imprints of specific places, a comparison between them highlights the dynamic range and potential of the culture of those places. A simple example would be a comparison between literary representations of Hong Kong and Shanghai. As the two coastal cities developed their metropolitan status within the context of Western imperialism, the insights gained by literary scholars are certainly helpful to the greater project of urban studies in general. More importantly, by introducing a framework of intercity comparative studies, alternative thinking will be inspired that takes us beyond the dichotomy of Hong Kong-versus-mainland China in the post-handover years.

However, the promotion of a transregional perspective on cultural production should always be accompanied by an awareness of the historical particularities of the places of production. Only by doing so can the transregional/transnational/translingual potential of Sinophonicity avoid “obscuring the non-conformities among and within different Sinitic languages, communities and cinemas [and so forth]” (Wei par. 11). In this fashion, I argue that Shih’s statement, “Sinophone culture is therefore transnational in constitution and formation but local in practice and articulation,” gains critical currency in the studies of global Chinese cultures (Shih, “Introduction” 6).

In light of the above discussion, employing Sinophonicity to examine literature’s capacity to push decolonization of Hong Kong first pays heavy attention to how they foster a historical consciousness regarding Hong Kong’s colonial formation. This is not to say that all fiction needs to be history-oriented. Rather, choosing texts that deal with the topic of history as a first move will ground the conceptual sharpness of Sinophonicity in specific terms. The reason is that fiction dealing with history cannot escape topics such as language, gender, ethnic and cultural

belonging, class, and so forth. Therefore, an understanding of Sinophonicity via the lens of history will arguably prepare for further explorations of other issues listed above.

More precisely, the coupling of fiction and historicity immediately brings to mind Hayden White's argument about the narrative nature of history writing in his book *Metahistory* (1973). As White astutely notes, a historical work is "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes" (White 2). If all writing of history is constructed like fictional narrative, according to White, historical fiction then has the capacity to shape our historical consciousness in the same way as historical records. Dung Kai-cheung's [董啟章] historical fiction arguably offers the best example of such a phenomenon.¹⁵ For instance, in the novel *Ditu Ji* [*Atlas: The Archaeology of an Imaginary City*; 1997; hereafter referred to as *Atlas*], Dung structures the narrative in a manner resembling that of a theoretical disquisition. This form is then coupled with his intersemiotic reading of both texts and maps about Hong Kong's past. In this way, the singularity of an official narrative of Hong Kong's history is shown to be of the same nature as myth-making.

Dung Kai-cheung has consistently produced works that challenge common modes of knowledge production within the city's cultural space. Moreover, his works often play with cultural theories, pushing for a deeper understanding of the ideological and social limits of any singular representation of Hong Kong. As such, his fiction "does not even confine itself to any discursive construction of a fictional Hong Kong. Instead, it investigates the relationship between

¹⁵ Besides Dung Kai-cheung, the most known or studied fictions that highlight a historical perspective on Hong Kong's colonial formation would be Shi Shu-ching [施叔清]'s Hong Kong trilogy, *City of the Queen: A Novel of Colonial Hong Kong* (1997), and Chan Koon-chung [陳冠中]'s *Xianggang Sanbu Qu* [*Hong Kong trilogy*, 2007]. Both Shi's and Chan's novels are heavily invested in the storylines of their protagonists' life ventures that span several decades of the latter half of the twentieth century. In considering the aesthetic attributes of each of the three writers' works, I feel that Dung's novel puts forward the most prominent accentuation of the issue of writing itself with regard to how history is perceived. As such, Dung's novel would make a stronger case for the link between Sinophonicity and Hong Kong fiction writing through the lens of history writing, whilst the novels by the other two writers sees history as more of a temporal movement under which many other political, social and cultural elements affect the subjectivities of local Hong Kongers.

fiction and Hong Kong” (Chu 261; my translation). It is for this reason that I use Dung’s novel *Tiangong Kaiwu: Xuxu Ruzhen* [*Works and Creation: Vivid and Lifelike*; 2005; abbreviated as *Works*] as a lens to investigate the meaning of history writing in Hong Kong. I see *Works* as an extended and more elaborate version of *Atlas*. More importantly, *Works* differs from Dung’s previous works in his creative combining of a history of artifacts with that of a multi-generational family narrative. In exploring the relationship between fiction and history, *Works* showcases how the lens of Sinophonicity leads to a multiplication of the possible relationships between individual Hong Kongers and the city. In this way, Dung challenges the dominance of the master narrative of history and identity in official discourse that has either colonialist or Chinese nationalistic ideological underpinning. In this way, the articulation of Sinophonicity in *Works* calls attention to the heterogeneous formation of subjectivity within Hong Kong, one that is deeply rooted in the material culture of its deeply capitalist social formation.

In my previous example of Liu Yi-chang’s writing, I briefly mentioned a consideration of gender in the conceptualization of Sinophonicity. The dimension of gender has not been highlighted in the discourse of Sinophone studies. However, it is an important one in this dissertation as Sinophonicity arguably attains its fullest critical agency from examining literary representations of the relationship between the self and city. To further elaborate this point, a dissection of Sinophonicity’s primary focus on history is necessary here. As scholar Joan W. Scott notes, studying history is to pursue “meaningful explanation” of “how things happened in order to find out why they happened...[But] to pursue meaning, we need to deal with the individual subject as well as social organization and to articulate the nature of their interrelationships” (Scott 1067). Scott’s focus on the interrelationship, in my opinion, is an implicit reference to the operation of power that engenders the various interrelationships between

subjects and society as observed from many existing historical writings. In this regard, literary narratives about history should not confine themselves to *his*-tory or *her*-story, but take on a more inclusive perspective. It is in this way that gender weighs in as an equally important element to our conceptualization of Sinophonicity. Since “gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated” (1069), an account of gender will yield more nuanced and in-depth look into the diverse possible articulations of Sinophonicity within the literary filed.

In brief, if a totalizing narrative of history can be contested by telling a personalized story, gender is a necessary site of analysis because it arguably pushes further the critical potential of that “personal” dimension. In addition, considering the shared cultural values between Hong Kong and mainland China as regards Confucian-based patriarchal norms, the incorporation of gender within a conception of Sinophonicity helps to articulate the divergence and convergence of cultural formation in Hong Kong and the mainland.

Hong Kong literature is no stranger to issues of gender, as many female writers have aspired to depict a city full of conflicting desires through stories of romance and family drama. However, arguably no one has ever written about women, love, and desire quite like Wong Bik-wan [黃碧雲].¹⁶ Like Dung Kai-cheung, Wong is a prominent local writer. Most of her works depict violence in an almost cathartic manner, especially when the portrayal of violence is closely linked to the status of women. As such, Wong’s work can be construed as a forceful act of voicing for underprivileged women and their diverse lifeways against hegemonic patriarchal

¹⁶ Hong Kong has presented to the world many excellent female writers, such as Xi Xi [西西], Li Pi-hua [李碧華], Zhong Xiao-yang [鍾曉陽], Hon Lai-chu [韓麗珠], and so forth. However, as these writers have testified, being categorized as female writers does not imply that their works are similar. More specifically, these writers have created works that cover a plethora of topics, such as male-female relationships, colonial modernity, urban dystopia and even Chinese mythologies. In this dissertation, I am choosing Wong Bik-wan because of her celebrated use of the Cantonese colloquialism in her novels, which creates a strong link to the concept of Sinophonicity. In the meantime, Wong’s literary depiction of an oral history by working-class women easily sets up a comparative perspective with Dung’s *Works* that concerns heavily with writing a history of the everyday majoritarian working-class person.

representation of submissive women in classical Chinese texts. This focus on the underprivileged groups or, more precisely, people of the lower class ranks aligns with that in many of Dung's works, such as *Works* in which the narrator is clear about the working class background of his family. In this regard, the choice of Wong's works here arguably offers an intertextual potential between the works by the two writers. This intertextual comparative potential additionally gives ways to more nuanced account of the subject formation of local Hong Kongers by Wong's attention to the violent aspect of gender, involving usually scenes of brutality experienced by women. As Joseph S. M. Lau [劉紹銘] rightly notes, "ugliness in the form of violence [in Wong's works] is not a metaphor, but a concrete presence... It is in her unblinking readiness to stare ugliness in the eye, and show it as it is, that sets Huang Biyun [sic.] apart" (J. Lau 157). Wong's work thus reveals a subaltern sensibility regarding women's lives.

However, Wong does not confine her writing only to depicting women, as she also pays attention to the ugly side of life experienced by both sexes. This view can be illustrated by one of Wong's famous short stories *Shicheng* ("Lost City") (1994), where Wong constructs the confusion and paradoxes experienced by Hong Kong people about the imminent handover through the portrayal of an atrocious murder crime. The murder is about a husband who slaughtered his wife and all of his children, including a newborn infant. The depiction of the murder in the story not only reveals a darker side of humanity, but also points to a broader context of social restlessness that partly explains the crime. This approach to portrayal helps Wong to further "carve out a unique place... by representing what hitherto has appeared to be the unrepresentable, which is neither significant nor absurd. Violence *is*, quite simply" (162; italics original). It is this forceful writing of the "unrepresentable," I argue, that makes Wong's work stand out in bringing to the fore the most brutal aspect of gender injustice and discrimination

operating within Hong Kong society.

Wong's unique aesthetic approach therefore becomes the subject of my analysis of gender in this thesis, adding more layers of social dynamics to Dung's sketch of lower class subject formation. The texts chosen from her oeuvre for this dissertation are *Lienü Tu* [*Portraits of Martyred Women*; 1999; *Portraits* in abbreviation] and *Lielao Zhuan* [*Children of Darkness*; 2013; abbreviated as *Children*]. What is unique about these two texts, other than Wong's specific narrative aesthetics, is her use of a historical lens in the narration. Wong's works may thus be helpfully compared with Dung's *Works*. By articulating a range of gendered subject positions, the sense of history which underpins Wong's works brings to the fore a provocative subaltern sensibility. This sensibility is arguably embedded in the resilient spirit shown by an array of gendered subjects, one that overthrows the reductive narrative that says Hong Kongers are all thriving in a successful Asian financial powerhouse.

To return to my earlier discussion of Sinophonicity, I mentioned that language and ethnicity are two of the key aspects from which this term obtains its meaning. Even though the lens of history in Sinophonicity will inevitably lead to discussions of these two aspects, they are not necessarily put to a contentious forefront. As such, the discussion of the relationship between Hong Kong literature and its coloniality would not be complete if issues of ethnic relations and language situations in Hong Kong were not contested. Xu Xi, as the most prominent English-language fiction writer in Hong Kong, is a pioneering figure in addressing these issues.¹⁷ This is important in that English language has always been attached the value of colonial elitist privilege.

¹⁷ Claiming Xu Xi as the most prominent local English-language fiction writer in no way negates the literary efforts made by her predecessors. The most representative figure would be Han Suyin whose novel *A Many-Splendoured Thing* (1952) was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, literary work addressing inter-racial relationships in Hong Kong in a non-Euro-centric fashion. But since Han Suyin's own sense of nationality had not always been identified as a Hong Konger, Xu Xi in this case makes a stronger argument simply by way of her background as being born and bred in Hong Kong. In a similar light, although Timothy Mo's works, such as *The Monkey King* (1978) and *An Insular Possession* (1986), have touched on Hong Kong, Xu Xi's continuous literary output makes her works worthy of more academic attention.

Xu Xi's works, by bringing up the issue of using English by local Hong Kongers who have a distinct upper-middle class upbringing, thus completes the picture made up of Dung's and Wong's working-class individuals. In addressing intra- and interethnic conflicts within Hong Kong society, what is often at stake, and also made clear, in Xu Xi's novels is a nagging self-awareness of the characters' excellent English proficiency, and the anxiety engendered because of it. Xu Xi's choice of a less-spoken, colonist language then narratorially reflects such an anxiety by way of expressing the protagonists' sense of marginalization.

Nevertheless, the capacity to use English to write about local subjects is also an opportunity to trouble our existing knowledge of culture.¹⁸ Ackbar Abbas once noted that writing Hong Kong is not concerned with "problems of corpus formation... [but] with asking how in the process of writing Hong Kong, Hong Kong as a cultural space inscribes itself in the text" (Abbas 111). This seemingly cliché statement, when applied to the study of English-language fiction in Hong Kong, becomes loaded with a new layer of political meaning. Although anxiety regarding feelings of belonging pervades Xu Xi's works, her act of writing itself is a reflection of her assertive attitude toward Hong Kong's cultural vitality. English, in this case, is vested with local tone and a new layer of affectivity.

Regarding this situation, Elaine Ho explains it best: "It is in creatively deterritorializing English in its dominant 'vehicular' functions that the fictional use of English in Hong Kong can 'take flight'" (E. Ho 31). As such, my selection of two of Xu Xi's texts in this thesis, *Hong Kong Rose* (1997) and *The Unwalled City* (2001), can be seen as a statement of what I hope to achieve

¹⁸ Xu Xi's writing primarily concerns the subjectivities of ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong, despite her linguistic affiliation with English. That there are diverse ethnic and racial demographics residing in Hong Kong society is not ignored in forming my argument in this introduction. However, whether we should use "Sinophone" or "Sinophonicity" to characterize the different living modalities of people who are, say, either Southeast Asian indentured workers or white Euro-American expatriates is, in my opinion, a strongly contested issue. After all, my intention is never to use Sinophone as an all-in-one umbrella term for all cultural activities in Hong Kong. As such, I stand behind my statement here, as it serves the majority ethnicities in Hong Kong that are addressed as "the local."

through the lens of Sinophonicity. The depiction of the different types of gender relations in these two novels may also be compared with Wong's texts, thus revealing the intersectionality of gender and class on identity formation. In this way, the complex network of power dynamics under which ethnic relations are situated is made more explicit. These are all important aspects of how I view the term "Sinophonicity."

2. Overview of Chapters

Taken together therefore this thesis aims to develop a conception of Sinophonicity that depicts the formation of the local subject as constructed in literary fiction, in order to articulate how Hong Kong literature produces decolonizing discourse and pressures. In examining current discussions of Sinophone leading up to Sinophonicity, I have located three aspects that are most pertinent to articulating the relationship between Hong Kong's coloniality and its literature—namely, history, gender and ethnicity. So far, no thesis (written in English or Chinese, within Hong Kong and beyond) has adopted the theoretical tool Sinophonicity to analyze any period of Hong Kong literary writings. My dissertation thus wishes to shed new light on the critical capacity of Hong Kong literature to delineate the complex historical formation of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture.

My first chapter investigates the construction of historical Sinophonicity in Dung Kai-cheung's *Works and Creation: Vivid and Lifelike*. The novel comprises two narrative strands, one about the narrator's family past and the other being a political analogy for contemporary Hong Kong. My analysis starts with the first narrative strand, in which the narrator's family history is told through the narration of the lived experiences of three generations of male descendants. The focus is on how this personalized history lays bare the workings of the dominant historical discourse of identity formation. In what ways, then, does the narrative offer

resistance to that dominant discourse? As I answer this question, my analysis also touches on Dung's narrative tactic whereby family history is structured as disjointed personal stories revolving around a series of artifacts. This narrative strategy arguably mounts resistance against the normative writing of history as seen in official discourse. Next, I proceed to discuss the second narrative strand, in which a fictional world of "person-objects" is introduced. The creation of the person-object world is a continuation of the strategy used in writing the narrator's family history. In this part of the analysis, I specifically ask how Dung constructs a political allegory of Hong Kong through that fictional world. I also look at how this second narrative strand is connected with the first one, both narratively and thematically. Ultimately, I attempt to argue Dung's *Works* exemplifies a concept of historical Sinophonicity that draws attention to the historicity of how the knowledge of self is created. This attention to self-knowledge in turn demonstrates the aesthetic appeal of literary language in enriching our understanding of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture.

Dung's exploration of historical writing sets the tone for the study of the decolonizing impetus animating the remaining texts. In chapter two, the discussion on Sinophonicity is continued, but this time with an emphasis on how a gendered perspective impacts the writing of history, by examining the gendered Sinophonicity deployed in Wong Bik-wan's *Portraits of Martyred Women* and *Children of Darkness*. My analysis starts with *Portraits* in which the lived experiences of three generations of women are narrated in the form of oral history. As in my analysis of Dung's work, I pay attention to the ways in which Wong constructs the female subject vis-à-vis the dominant, patriarchal representation of women as ideally submissive subjects. My analysis also explores the political implications of writing an oral history vis-à-vis the traditional historiography of women. The chapter then proceeds to Wong's construction of

masculinity in *Children*. The focus of the analysis is on, firstly, how Wong styles the life story of a vagabond drug addict/street gangster through his use of the Cantonese vernacular. At the same time, this chapter also suggests that the subjectivity of a gendered individual can be shaped in sites other than the domain of the family. Overall, the gendered Sinophonicity exemplified by the two texts underscores the diversified gender dynamics operating within Hong Kong as well as the resilience embedded within the gender practices and performances of the everyday person.

While the two authors above have provided critical insight into the diverse living experiences of Hong Kong people, the characters discussed are all ethnic Han Chinese people living in Hong Kong. In the third chapter, I set up a comparison with the other two chapters concerning the construction of gendered subjects from different class and ethnic backgrounds by examining the ethnic Sinophonicity deployed in Xu Xi's *Hong Kong Rose* and *The Unwalled City*. Specifically, I ask how the notion of ethnic Sinophonicity in the novels offers a nuanced perspective on the ethnic relations of Hong Kong society. By examining three women characters from the two novels, I highlight the manner in which their perceptions of ethnicity affect their positioning as Hong Kong Chinese subjects. Moreover, I call attention to how this sense of ethnic identity is tightly linked to the characters' class status. In analyzing these questions, this chapter also raises the key issue of language use. I explore how the English language is used to represent the paradoxes, compromises, and precarity of the living situations of these women. In this way, English offers a critical distance from which the normative discourse of Chineseness in Hong Kong is critiqued. Thus, the juxtaposition of Xu Xi's writings with the other texts demonstrates how the genre of literary fiction can help to expand the parameters of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture.

Chapter One: Writing the Historical Self— Fiction, Artifacts and the Making of History in Dung Kai-cheung's *Works and Creation: Vivid and Lifelike*

Many contemporary efforts to postulate a local Hong Kong identity have relied on the narrative of a collective history shared by denizens of the city. However, the richness of Hong Kong's colonial formation cannot be told by a singular narrative. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, all historical narrative are lodged in the nexus of power between Western imperialism, Chinese nationalism and localism. To decolonize Hong Kong then requires, first and foremost, a re-evaluation of our existing historical knowledge of the city. This first chapter, therefore, sets out to discuss how literary fiction contributes to critical studies on Hong Kong's colonial heritage through the concept of historical Sinophonicity. Historical Sinophonicity places a premium on the historicity of how the knowledge of self is created within networks of power relations present in Hong Kong's Sinophone space. I argue that Dung Kai-cheung's 2005 novel *Works and Creation: Vivid and Lifelike*¹⁹ best represents this point through its construction of a history that draws attention not only to the mechanism of writing the past but also to the interrelationships between past and present. The writing, despite touching upon the lived experiences of three generations in the narrator's family, is told through the narrator's single subject position. By analyzing the construction of such Sinophonicity in *Works*, this chapter hopes to raise critical awareness regarding any over-simplification of Hong Kong's colonial heritage from either nationalistic or nativist political discourse.

¹⁹ In June 2018, Hong Kong University press published an English translation of the novel. Translated by Yau Wai-ping [邱偉平], the translated version is entitled *The History of the Adventures of Vivi and Vera*. As important as the publication of another translation of Dung's novels signifies, I have decided not to directly quote from the translated version for textual analysis. The reason is that since my argument about Sinophonicity pays specific attention to the use of literary language, quoting from a translated version would somehow unsettle this main argument, bringing up a new sets of questions that are beyond the scope of this dissertation. As such, the textual quotes used in this chapter are ad hoc translations done by myself, in hopes of underlining the relationship between the original text and the notion of historical Sinophonicity.

Specifically, historical Sinophonicity entails two aspects of meaning here. First, it poses as a challenge to the dominant historical discourse on Hong Kong. In tracing his family's past, the narrator in *Works* constructs a history of tangible things revolving around thirteen modern artifacts, which at the same time conjure up a sense of collective nostalgia for the city's past. The narrator's family history distinguishes itself from the collective grand historical narrative by investing the artifacts with personal affective meaning. This way of writing family history, as a result, manifests in a series of disjointed personal stories, signifying the many possible ways in which the city's past can be told. In so doing, Dung's writing pushes for a more grounded account of Hong Kong's social formation, which is arguably overlooked in official narratives. Dung's tactile use of literary language thus exemplifies the aesthetic potential granted by Hong Kong's Sinophone space in enriching our understanding of colonialism.

Secondly, historical Sinophonicity is also shown through an emphasis on the dialogic relationship between the past and the present in the making of history. This can be illustrated by the interweaving structure of two parallel narrative strands in *Works*, linked together by a concept of possible worlds. The concept of possible worlds as spelled out in the novel is a reinstatement of the first meaning of historical Sinophonicity discussed above. The narrator not only traces a history of his family's past, but also continues his act of history-writing by creating a tale that parallels Hong Kong in more recent times. By parallel, my analysis highlights Dung's foregrounding of how our knowledge of the present situation is predicated on discourses produced in the writing of the past. Similar to the narrator's attempt to write an alternative version of his family past, the tale in the second narrative strand of *Works* is an alternative to the present Hong Kong as we know. This particular form that *Works* takes on then adds to the argument made above that literary language can contribute to the decolonization of Hong Kong

by offering narrative mediation on the matter of history.

The analysis of this chapter begins with a brief theoretical discussion of the significance of writing a personalized family history vis-à-vis established official histories in post-colonial Hong Kong. This section also touches on the value of historical fiction as a genre that can offer decolonizing impetus on Hong Kong's historical legacy. Next, the focus shifts to how the narrator's family history is narrated in *Works* through his construction of a history of modern artifacts. This approach to Hong Kong's history corresponds to the narrator's creation of a world populated by person-objects in the second narrative strand of the novel. My analysis then moves to the second narrative strand, where an analogy between the imaginative piece and contemporary Hong Kong society is drawn. Together, the narrative techniques displayed in the two narrative strands foreground a notion of historical Sinophonicity, one that advocates grounded, multi-layered, and open-ended interpretations of Hong Kong's history and identity.

1. Writing History in Hong Kong—Family Narratives and History's Elided Potentialities

In *Chongxie Wocheng de Gushi* [*Rewriting the History of My City*, 2010], Hui Po-keung [許寶強] notes the variety of ongoing attempts to write of Hong Kong's history. In these narratives, while Hong Kong's economic success and socio-political progressiveness are featured, the cultural marginality and declining global competitiveness it had faced following the 1997-handover are also put on the spotlight. These multiple, and sometimes contradictory, stances bring to mind Jacques Rancière's notion of the "poetics of knowledge." As Rancière claims, the truth of history is not "in the form of an explicit philosophical thesis, but in the very texture of narrative: in the modes of interpretation, but also in the style of the sentences, the tense and person of the verb, the plays of the literal and the figurative" (Rancière 89). While Rancière correctly underlines the textual aspect of the historical narrative, his writing conveniently falls

into a conventional conceptual framework in which the historical narrative is assumed to be a mimesis of “objective” reality. In this regard, although the written histories of Hong Kong have been prolific, they run the risk of limiting our thinking of history writing, restricting them to a mere “realistic” reflection of a set of known political dates.

The fallacy within such a framework also finds resonance in Hayden White’s discussion of metahistory. According to White, a historical narrative is “a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes” (White, *Metahistory* 2). White’s words undermine any natural correlation between history and reality. Subsequently, history is, in Boccardi’s words, deprived “of its self-constituted distinction with respect to fiction, namely its claim to truthfulness” (Boccardi 7). Boccardi argues that history has a more complicated relationship with reality than that of mimesis, which is not unlike that of fiction. Given the complex relations between fiction and reality to begin with, the similarity that can be glimpsed here between history and fiction implies that there is a similar complicated relationship between history and reality. Such a relationship is substantiated in Chu Yiu-wai’s [朱耀偉] argument concerning Dung’s *Atlas* (1997), which was cited in the introductory chapter. Simply put, Chu contends that Hong Kong literature focuses less on the realistic portrayal of the city than on exploring the relationship between imagination and the city. Literature and the city space, according to Chu, are seen in a mutually constitutive relationship. Following this, literary fiction has the potential to challenge conventional modes of thinking. It is from this consideration that this chapter argues for the function of literary fiction to mediate how one perceives Hong Kong’s historical formation.

This section discusses the manners in which literary fiction, particularly historical fiction, offers creative mediation into the established historiography of Hong Kong. As Jerome de Groot

notes, “a historical novel might consider the articulation of nationhood via the past, highlight the subjectivism of narratives of History, underline the importance of the realist mode of writing to notions of authenticity, question writing itself, and attack historiographical convention” (Groot 2). Groot’s words succinctly summarize the various thematic concerns regarding the writing of a historical fiction. Nevertheless, they lack detail in terms of describing which specific modes of representation bring forth these themes, which is truly where the agency of historical fiction lies. In what follows, this section first traces some of the important intellectual discussions surrounding the genre of historical fiction. This section then proceeds to discuss how Dung’s *Works* contributes to these intellectual discussions by offering a grounded observation of Hong Kong’s historical particularities.

1.1 The Historical Fiction

One recurring theme in *Works* is Dung’s comparison between writing and man-made objects. More precisely, Dung sees the two categories as sharing similar processes of production. Namely, each category involves a process of, firstly, drawing resources from elsewhere and, then, manufacturing them according to certain principles. However, in applying these principles, there is always a form of creative energy present that give way for more diverse products to be manufactured. In this way, a piece of writing is able to respond in a critical fashion to the context within which it is produced. It is this process of writing that underpins Dung’s construction of historical Sinophonicity in *Works*, as it underlines an ethical dimension to the novel, which is really, I argue, the location of the novel’s agency. A few questions then arise: what is the meaning of this ethical dimension? What are the implications of its association with historical fiction? How is it linked to the articulation of historical Sinophonicity in *Works*? The following paragraphs aim to answer these questions, in hopes of unraveling the political agency embedded

in the genre of historical fiction.

Within the critical discourse of historical fiction, the dimension of ethics is nothing new. In the eighteenth century, the French philosopher Hugh Blair had noted that fictitious history is “one of the best channels for conveying instruction, for painting human life and manners, for showing the errors into which we are betrayed by our passions, for rendering virtue amiable and vice odious” (qtd. in Emerson 126). Blair views the function of historical fiction as to enlighten, by means of reflecting both the virtues and vices of the past. Although such a position presupposes that fiction should be a mimesis of objective reality, his words put a premium on the ethical aspect of writing. Here, this ethical aspect connotes a moral imperative to distinguish what is right from wrong. This point is refurbished with more political sharpness when put in the context of Marxism. The most famous example is Georg Lukács’s discussion of Walter Scott’s novel *Waverley* in his book *The Historical Novel* (1962). As Lukács argues, “what matters therefore in the historical novel is not the retelling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality” (Lukács 27). What differentiates Lukács’ view from Blair’s is, quite importantly, a thematic shift away from moral concerns to that of one’s personal ethical conduct vis-à-vis regimes of oppressive power. Lukács’ focus on individual stories is arguably rooted in his Marxist intellectual disposition. The individuals that he champions belong to the proletarian class who are struggling against capitalist exploitations. In a sense, his attention to the underprivileged working class resembles the politics of postcolonial writing about the lived experience of the colonized people. In a way, Lukács’ idea of the ethical gives more room in historical fiction to fashion the diverse lived experiences of individuals, rather than confining

them to the simple dichotomous categories of morally right or wrong.

It is historical fiction's capacity to fashion various personal experiences that grants it the agency to stand against the official versions of Hong Kong's written history. This ethical aspect does not only manifest in the content but also in the form of a work of historical fiction. Form here refers to the formal attributes of historical fiction that are viewed as integral to allowing the work of historical fiction to act as a mediative discourse to counteract normative ideas of history writing. In this regard, Lukács' view of the form of historical fiction is still limited to that of a mimetic representation of reality. As Diana Wallace critiques, Lukács's "valorization of realism as a form which reflects the life of the people leads first to his rejection of the potential of any other modes of writing... to express a relationship to history" (Wallace 11). Wallace calls into question, I argue, the practices behind a long-lasting tradition of writing historical fiction. Specifically, following Lukács' line of thinking, the focus of analyzing a historical fiction had always been based on its historical representation of events rather than its aesthetic values. Similarly, Paul Wake writes that "the prevailing response, from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, was to regard historical fiction as an adjunct to history capable of offering its own form of historical insight" (Wake 83). Wake opposes the idea that the aesthetic values of historical fiction are subservient to its representation of historical events. At another level, such a position echoes Hayden White's skepticism concerning the nature of "History," as cited above. It perhaps comes as no wonder then that the mode of historiographic metafiction gains popularity in effectively subverting previous understanding about what historical fiction is. As Linda Hutcheon observes in *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), historiographic metafiction "does not mirror reality; nor does it reproduce it. It cannot. There is no pretense of simplistic mimesis in historiographic metafiction. Instead, fiction is offered as another of the discourses by which we

construct our versions of reality” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 6). The form that a historical fiction takes is, according to Hutcheon, an integral part of the meaning underlying its ethics. Based on the above criticism, historical fiction is thus redeemed of their literary merits due to its ability to articulate the different relationships between the individual and the past.

In writing Hong Kong’s past, an examination of the formal attributes of historical fiction is of utter importance, as its form embodies the particular ways in which literary writers engage with social reality. Such an examination also demonstrates how creative energy could provide critical insights into the changing circumstances under which the work is situated. This leads to the recognition of “the subjectivity, the uncertainty, the multiplicity of truths inherent in any account of past events” (Rozett 145). Historiographic metafiction, in this regard, fulfills the task of attaining this recognition by its “intense self-reflexivity and overtly parodic intertextuality” (Hutcheon, *Historiographic* 3). However, the mode of historiographic metafiction is not the only available option to achieve such recognition. Katharine Harris, for instance, notes a neo-historical aesthetic in the current writing of historical fiction:

the neo-historical aesthetic acknowledges the inevitable failure of narratives about the past but—in contrast to its postmodern predecessor, historiographic metafiction—simultaneously and contradictorily works to create coherent stories about it that recognize their own limitations even as they attempt to overcome them. The ‘aesthetic,’ then, is the set of images, ideas and themes through which past and present are made present within a cohesive narrative. (Harris 194)

Harris clearly differentiates the new trend of historical fiction writing from its postmodern counterpart. Nevertheless, nowhere in her essay does Harris mention a linear progression from historiographic metafiction to this new one. My contention is that these two styles can be both

applied to examine historical writing in the contemporary era, as they both delineate the different relationships between literary fiction and social reality. However, it is noteworthy that Harris's notion of the neo-historical aesthetic adds a new layer of meaning to the ethical dimension of the novel, namely the desire for coherent stories. This ethical dimension arguably re-aligns the neo-historical aesthetic with Lukács' line of argument above, which grants historical fiction the capacity to foreground narratives about individual struggles to reset meanings of identity and culture. In the case of Hong Kong, the ethical aspect of creating coherent stories is much needed, as it helps to build up a collective sense of communal life through the telling of the individual Hong Konger's stories.

Regardless of the different naming of these concepts, I argue that historiographic metafiction and neo-historical narratives can share common formal narrative devices, one being that of metafiction. In her analysis of contemporary British historical fiction, Mariadele Boccardi holds that "a degree of metafictionality is inherent in the historical novel *qua* historical novel. On a purely formal level, in fact, the historical novel makes literal the historicizing dimension of narrative" (Boccardi 9). Based on Boccardi's argument, it becomes irrelevant to ask whether a novel belongs to the postmodern or neo-historical traditions, as the boundary between them can be blurry at times. The focus of analyzing a historical novel should always remain on, I contend, interrogating "the complex relation between knowing and meaning, epistemology and ethics, or more mundanely, experience and expectation" therein (White, "Historical Fictions" 47). To this end, the more pertinent issue in analyzing historical fiction is to investigate how it effectively utilizes its narrative techniques to intervene in the existing perception of history. In doing so, our attention is directed toward "new conceptual resources and novel forms of representation that might be useful... for shedding light on what understanding the past involves" (Fay 1). It is in

this way that the genre of historical fiction keeps its vitality in the face of changing socio-political conditions around the world.

Additionally, our perception of history is, I argue, tightly linked to our perceptions of self, as well as cultural values. In order to have an accurate understanding of history, it then requires the literary writer's grounded knowledge of the social conditions of a particular locale. This chapter then argues that Dung Kai-cheung's *Works* precisely obtains its ethical dimension of using individual stories to resist official versions of Hong Kong's written history through the construction of historical Sinophonicity out of personal narratives. At the same time, *Works* blurs any categorical boundaries within the genre of historical fiction such as that between historiographic metafiction and neo-historical narratives. As is shown in the following, the formal attributes of Dung's historical fiction may be said to unlock new metaphors for thinking about colonialism in Hong Kong.

1.2 Writing Family History in Hong Kong

Premised on the critical considerations of historical writing above, this chapter examines Dung Kai-cheung's historical fiction, *Works*, in pursuit of the argument that the text provokes a re-examination of the historicity behind the formation of identity in Hong Kong. If we insist that Hong Kong's history be pluralistic, the history of the everyday person or denizen should be a valid representation of this plurality. Family history arguably is the most common motif utilized to represent such personal histories in this regard, as it can effectively circumvent the all too familiar grand narratives of Hong Kong's history. To elaborate on this point, I cite Heidi Huang Yu's [黃峪] categorization of two major master narratives of historiography currently in Hong Kong. As Huang writes: "The first type focuses on Hong Kong's status as a prosperous international city and attributes its stability and prosperity to the diligent citizens and their

affinity to the colonial language and culture. The second, nationalist type criticizes Hong Kong's colonial situation and envisages its ideal future after returning to the motherland" (H. Y. Huang 374). Huang's words capture the effect of colonialism and nationalism on our historical consciousness. Despite the incompatibility between the two master narratives, they nevertheless delineate the same notion of, in Walter Benjamin's term, "progression through a homogeneous, empty time" (Benjamin 261). Whether it is called progress or regress, Hong Kong's modernity is written in a fixed temporal format. This point brings to mind my argument in the introductory chapter about the existence of two temporalities within the city's social space. One is clocked by the dates of political change, like Huang's two master narratives. The other is charted along the axis of the psycho-cultural change experienced by the local people. This chapter then sees family history as participating in the second type of temporality in its depiction of the everyday person.

Notably, family history is not subversive by default against official historiography, as the writer might unconsciously reinforce the master historiography by conforming to the same narrative strategy of linear progression in the process of writing family history. The subversive potential of history writing then lies, I argue, in its strategic representation of the lived experiences of common people. As Harry Harootunian observes, "ramming memory and experience into the structured constraints of a narrative is like putting the everyday into a straitjacket that will keep some things in and bound, and keep a lot out" (Harootunian 141). Harootunian vividly depicts a gloomy situation where historical fiction loses its critical edge and becomes only a footnote to the master narrative. Therefore, providing a pluralistic portrayal of the human subject requires formal experimentation in the process of writing a family history. As the form of a family history narrative steers away from the conventional mode of historical narrative within which a linear temporality is embedded, a horizontal perspective is introduced

whereby more nuanced aspects of personal experiences of the family members have room to manifest themselves in such a literature. In this way, family history can “throw into question the solidity not only of the history of the family, class relationships and the power relations between men and women but also of the history of nation and empire” (Evans 51). Dung Kai-cheung’s *Works* is illustrative of just such a point. Through the juxtaposition of a series of disjointed personal stories, Dung problematizes the prevailing modes of understanding how identity is formed in official historical discourse in Hong Kong.

Specifically, Dung Kai-cheung catalogs thirteen modern inventions to structure his narration of family history in *Works*. The thirteen artifacts are radio, telegraph/telephone, lathes, sewing machines, television, cars, game consoles, watches, typewriters, cameras, cassette recorders and books. These artifacts are at once collective and personal. By collective, I mean that these artifacts represent collective memories of generations of Hong Kong residents. By personal, I refer to Dung’s move to infuse these artifacts with renewed symbolic significance in the text. This act of meaning giving is to some extent similar to that of myth-making. As such, the artifacts become a site where the historical and fictional are juxtaposed into a coherent narrative. Regarding the relationship between historical and fictional narratives, Hsiao-Peng Lu helpfully argues, “historical writings and fictional writings...spread out on a horizontal, contemporaneous plane of textual relationship so as to expose the instances of their mutual embarrassment, jeopardy, and disagreement” (H. P. Lu 53). In giving new meanings to the artifacts, *Works* exposes, according to Lu, the workings of dominant discourse on identity. This problematization concurrently entails a process in which Hong Kong’s colonial legacy is expressed in the specific terms presented by the subjectivity of a diverse range of characters. Furthermore, since all characters, namely the narrator’s grandfather, his father and himself, are

regrouped together under the rubric of each artifact, no linear progression of multi-generational storyline is present in the text. By doing so, *Works* also refuses the teleological inclination embedded in official histories, which largely restricts our perception of Hong Kong's present situations.

The historical Sinophonicity stemmed from this way of history writing, I contend, defeats any attempt to categorize *Works* under the label of either historiographic metafiction or neo-historical narratives. All in all, such a notion of Sinophonicity connotes an ethic of writing historical fiction to showcase history's "elided potentialities," which are often expressed through a "highly conflicted struggle over what should be remembered and what forgotten" (Middleton & Woods 1). To this end, the textual analysis in the rest of this chapter focuses on the construction of historical Sinophonicity, as expressed through the narrator's construction of the main characters' subject formation in *Works*. However, it is crucial to note that Dung's literary effort to construct the meaning of historical Sinophonicity in *Works* has more layers than mentioned above. The following sections will thus first investigate how the notion of historical Sinophonicity calls into question the existing epistemology of identity formation in Hong Kong through a consideration of the narrator's writing of his family history. Specifically, my analysis examines how the artifacts are imagined as an extension of the characteristics of the narrator's grandfather Dong Fu and his father Dong Xian. My analysis then moves on to expose how artifacts are used as metaphors to construct a collective imaginary of Hong Kong during the narrator's formative years. The discussion in this part also focuses on the manners in which the narrator reappropriates the meaning-giving mechanisms enshrined in the artifacts to problematize that collective imaginary. In the last section, my analysis dives into how the notion of historical Sinophonicity deems necessary to include the dialogical relationship between the past and the

present in the writing of history. This is achieved by analyzing an “imaginative” piece of writing created by the narrator, which is viewed as a political analogy for contemporary Hong Kong. By organizing my analysis in this way, this chapter drives toward an understanding of historical Sinophonicity that rests on a concept of possible worlds, which delineates that the present situation in which we live is one of the many possible realities that occurs at any point in time. It is on the basis of this note that *Works* is able to reveal history’s elided potentialities in the forming of self-knowledge.

2. Writing the Self in Dung Kai-cheung’s *Works*—Subverting the Norm in Possible Worlds

My argument that Dung Kai-cheung’s *Works* best represents literary fiction’s potential to produce decolonizing discourses on Hong Kong’s historical legacy can be first observed in the series title of the novel. *Works* is the first book of Dung’s *Natural History Trilogy*.²⁰ The series title already suggests Dung’s unique approach to viewing human activities by their creative nature, one that is the same as natural creations. As Dung himself says in a talk about *Works*, he “tries to trace further back the history of city-modeled civilization, into its origin or boundary, thereby exposing the living conditions for humans in contemporary times” (Dung, “From Works” 101; my translation). In the process of tracing alternative history in *Works*, Dung points out an overlap between the bounds of human civilization and nature, particularly on the subject of creation. As nature provides the material basis of our modern life, it follows that human civilization is also about creating knowledge, in terms of manufacturing new material things or discourses, by drawing upon extant resources. This unique way of viewing human history through the trope of creation forms the basis of the notion of historical Sinophonicity examined in this chapter.

²⁰ The trilogy has now expanded into four books, with the second one *Shijian Fanshi: Yaci Zhi Guang* (*Histories of Time: The Lustre of Mute Porcelain*) and the third one *Wuzhong Yuanshi: Beibei Chongsheng* (*The Origin of Species: Beibei is Reborn*). The fourth one is still being written.

Works contains altogether fourteen chapters, divided evenly into two interweaving strands of narrative. The chapters in each strand are marked by numbers from one to twelve. Each numbered chapter of the first strand is juxtaposed in the text by the same numbered chapter from the second. The first strand tells the stories of three generations in the narrator's family, including his grandparents, his parents and himself. The second strand narrates an invented story by the narrator of the protagonist Xu Xu's life in a world occupied by *renwu* [人物; literally meaning person-objects]²¹. Xu Xu's world serves as, according to Deng Anqing [鄧安慶], "a crosscut of the spiritual world of contemporary Hong Kong" (Deng 18; my translation). The juxtaposition of the two narrative strands then reflects a dialogical relationship between past and present. They are linked together, I argue, through a common theme of how to create knowledge about one's selfhood. This connection is also mentioned in the preface to the novel where Dung devises another figure named "the dictator" to write an introduction. As the dictator candidly notes, "*Works* is a book about the self. The author attempts to establish an image of self through the narrator's account of the family history and his personal growing-up" (Dung, *Works* 4)²². This exploration of selfhood through history is what this chapter deems as the expression of historical Sinophonicity.

If the notion of historical Sinophonicity is the result of the narrator's inquiry into his own subject formation, does it then only have a singular meaning? In other words, does the narrator's act of self-discovery lead to a subject position that tells a teleological tale of the city's history? Dung is arguably aware of this possibility, as he speaks through the figure of the dictator on the question of unity in constructing an image of the self in *Works*. According to the dictator, the

²¹ The naming of these occupants as person-objects is a direct reference to the creation of "characters", which in Chinese also mean *renwu* in fiction writing. I will discuss more of this aspect in later analysis.

²² All the quotations from this novel, if not otherwise indicated, are translated into English by myself.

unity of the self is unattainable, as the self is expressed through fragmented figures of metaphor in the text. These metaphorical figures refer to the thirteen modern artifacts through which the narrator structures his account of his family history. By rendering his family history as disjointed, the narrator only presents a “temporary, imagined unity,” one that is similar to the making of myths (3). In this fashion, the novel can be read as “a quest for this unity, and the anxiety and frustration over its unattainability” (3-4). The tension between unity and unattainability then calls into question the ability of the official histories of Hong Kong to fully tell of each individual’s identity.

Furthermore, I argue, this tension leads to a notion of possible worlds in *Works*, which further adds complication to the meaning of historical Sinophonicity. Historical Sinophonicity does not acquire its critical energy merely through its negation of the dominant discourses regarding identity. It also mandates the co-existence of many possible worlds that are constructed by different temporalities and historical events. In other words, the present situation in which we are living is one of the many possible historical contingencies set by a particular past. In this regard, the clichéd saying that how we view the past directly bears upon our decisions to deal with issues in the present world deserves serious attention here. By means of such a discussion, historical Sinophonicity argues for an understanding of history writing that takes the present situation into consideration. In doing so, Hong Kong’s social space is shown through the aesthetic potential of writing and language, articulating a space for producing heterogeneous, historically situated, and culturally specific modes of knowledge on identity formation.

2.1 Of the Past— Artifacts and Family History

Bearing the above discussion in mind, this section focuses on analyzing the narrator’s construction of his family history in *Works*. The most salient feature is, as my previous

discussion repeatedly states, the cataloging of thirteen modern artifacts as axes around which the narrator's family history is constructed. It would be inaccurate, however, to conclude that such a choice of narrative structure alone sums up Dung's novel contribution to the genre of historical fiction. Simply for the artifacts chosen in the novel are not exclusive to Hong Kong society. In fact, capitalist expansion has led to the circulation of those artifacts on a global scale. In light of this, my argument in this section is placed in the ways in which the narrator uses the medium of fiction writing to deterritorialize and subsequently reterritorialize the symbolic meanings behind those artifacts in the novel. In other words, my analysis investigates how the narrator reappropriates the meaning-giving mechanisms which were used by institutions of power to form singular perceptions of identity in Hong Kong, to inject personal meanings into the thirteen artifacts. This materiality of Dung's writing thus constitutes the first meaning of historical Sinophonicity in this chapter, culminating in the notion of possible worlds with regard to history writing.

To begin with, the correlation between the distribution of artifacts and the formation of the human subject in Hong Kong needs more deliberation. Esther Cheung once held that Dung's "cataloging technique" enables him to "define what Hong Kong culture is by way of retrieval of what are 'made' in Hong Kong and more importantly by way of how people respond to such bombardments [of man-made goods]" (E. Cheung 578). Cheung highlights the essential role that modern artifacts have in shaping the collective historical consciousness of Hong Kong people. In a similar vein, Hee Wai-siam [許維賢] comments that *Works* is "a textbook of the New (Historical) Materialism written for the collective nostalgia of the three generations [of the narrator's family]" (Hee 6; my translation). Hee's view is more emphatic, as he argues that material objects define the cultural identity of generations of Hong Kong residents. Hee terms

such a collective nostalgia a type of fetishism. The notion of collective nostalgia as fetishism is the result of, I contend, Hong Kong's close participation in the capitalist network of production and circulation around the globe both before and after the Handover. Nonetheless, the relationship between artifacts and subject formation should not be seen as one-directional. To expound this point, I cite Chau Man-lut [鄒文律], who borrows Baudrillard's term "singularity" to describe the nature of Dung's cataloging the thirteen modern objects. As Chau argues, singular objects "sit outside all the added social, political, space and even aesthetic interpretations" (Chau 242; my translation). In Chau's view, an artifact is itself meaningless. Its meaning, as we commonly understand it, is imposed upon the object by external forces. By virtue of this, "if objects are truly singular, the 'real world' is *not exchangeable* with its representational forms (words, concepts etc) and therefore... 'escapes' dominant codes of signification and systems of exchange" (Cole 2). Because our perception of artifacts inevitably carries some a priori meaning, the "real world" then does not apply in our understanding of the objects. Instead, what we have are multiple possible realities, one of which will eventually manifest as the reality in which we are living in accordance to particular historical contingencies.

From this consideration, the relationship between artifacts and the human subject should be construed as pluralistic. The pluralistic nature of the relationship between artifacts and the human subject, in turn, makes the narrator's reappropriation of the meaning-giving mechanisms on artifacts possible. As the narrator's act of reappropriation depends on historical contingency, it attests to the aforementioned tension between the pursuit of unity of self and its simultaneous unattainability. In other words, in the narrator's portrayal of the subject formation of his grandfather, his father and himself, the tactics of reappropriation are bound to vary. What we read in *Works*, subsequently, is a series of narratives that "cannot be paradigmatic, cannot be

exemplary of a pattern, a sequence upon which traditional historical narratives depend” (Ballif 244). It should be noted that the incoherence of the narrative does not diminish the affective impact of the writing itself by any means. On the contrary, the various methods the narrator adopts in his reappropriation lead to the colorful range of symbols by which the thirteen artifacts are viewed in the novel. As A. S. Byatt rightly notes, there exists “an aesthetic need [to write historical fiction]... to keep past literatures alive and singing, connecting the pleasure of writing to the pleasure of reading” (Byatt 11). The affective rendering of individual stories in *Works* hence serves as a strong testament to the cultural vitality of Hong Kong’s Sinophone space.

2.1.1 The Stories of Dong Fu and Dong Xian

To fully unpack the arguments made in the previous section, this section first examines the subject formations of the narrator’s grandfather Dong Fu and his father Dong Xian. I contend that the symbolism of the artifacts employed in their stories are directly extended from the practical functions of those artifacts. Insofar as the narrator can never gain the full knowledge of his (grand)father’s pasts, he uses imagination in his writing to construct stories based on the artifacts most associated with them. The first chapter of the family narrative strand is called “Radio,” where the eponymous artifact is employed to usher in the love story of the narrator’s grandparents, Dong Fu and Long Jinyu. When the narrator switches the channels on his radio receiver, he immediately presents us with his adaptation of the workings of the radio:

I try to position my sensorial receptacles directly to the source of the electromagnetic wave, capturing every bit of it, adjusting the frequency of memory or imagination, waiting for resonance to happen, embellishing it, amplifying it, then returning it to the original color, making it a reconstruction with high verisimilitude and veracity. (Dung, *Works* 22)

The narrator arguably turns the diaphanous nature of radio transmission into a symbol for the remoteness of the love story between his grandparents. The foregrounding of imagination seems to loudly announce that his grandparents' past can never be fully restored. However, by emphasizing functions such as "embellishing" and "amplifying," the metaphor of the radio is also seen for its capacity to effectively resist the erasure of their love story from history.

To expound on this point, I refer to Greg Forter's argument on the radical agency of postcolonial historical fiction. As Forter argues, the postcolonial historical novel can "work to recover from the historical past new resources from the radical imagination" (Forter 1332). Forter is saying that imagination can possess a radical nature that "resist[s] our dominant historiography" (1332). To do that, the literary writer needs to "retrieve from the dustbin of history the unassimilable, heterogeneous traces of stories" (1332). Then, s/he will use their imagination to make the "unassimilable" into a coherent whole that unveils different aspects of lived reality that have been neglected in the master historiography. As such, their imagination acquires a radical nature. In the case of Dong Fu and Long Jinyu, their "radical" imagination is shown through the narrator's play with the figure of the radio. Nevertheless, the imagined nature of their love story by no means makes the rendering of their personalities any less real, however. As Hayden White helpfully contends, "the real would consist of everything that can be truthfully said about its actuality plus everything that can be truthfully said about what it could *possibly* be" (White, *Introduction* 147). White's statement touches on the ethical aspect of history writing, echoing the notion of elided potentialities that have been discussed in the theoretical section of this chapter. In considering what should be remembered, our perception is often regulated by a normative logic of objective truthfulness. If Forter and White have anything to agree upon, I argue that it is their questioning of such logic. Imagination, accordingly, introduces the realm of

possibility and its capacity to construct a coherent narrative to further develop our idea of what is truthful and real. In this way, Dong and Long's love story reveals more facets of their personalities than are shown from the fragments of the narrator's actual memory.

More specifically, the narrator uses imagination in the narrative to subvert the rigid stereotypes that both Dong and Long present to outsiders including their own family members. Dong Fu, is often introduced with the prefixed adjective *zhengzhi* [正直; upright]. The descriptor "upright" here suggests that Dong is honest, down-to-earth, moral and straightforward. On the contrary, Long Jinyu is depicted as *niuqu* [扭曲; crooked], referring to her unusually out-of-place behaviors in comparison to other people. Her character is most saliently illustrated by her ability to directly hear radio signals transmitted in the air. The first time Dong and Long meet is when Long accidentally receives the radio signal sent for Dong from his colleague in an experiment to test Dong's newly invented radio transmitter. As the narrator writes, "[a]lthough the last experiment failed... [Dong Fu] accidentally obtained something more important" (Dung, *Works* 34). The figure of the radio in this situation is not only a love token between the two characters, but it is also an indicator of the effect of stereotyping on Dong and Long. For Dong and Long seem to stand on opposite ends of the personality spectrum to outsiders. As their only means to a connection, the diaphanous-natured radio delineates the degree of credulity with which their marriage is perceived from the outside. In fact, Dung never casts doubt upon Long's belief in her supernatural ability, despite his science education background. As evidenced in the text, Dong "[i]s a student of science, never believe[s] in any mysterious or supernatural things, but he never rebuff[s] or question[s] the words of his newly wedded wife" (27). The dichotomy between Dong's scientific pursuit and Long's supernatural power is dismantled by the love connection that is established between the two. Consequently, the meaning of the radio, as the

metaphor that represents the nature of their love, also switches from its diaphanous nature to, I argue, exhibit a certain duality; as a product of science, the radio is also a product of human's imagination.

This duality is further elaborated by Liu Wai-tong [廖偉棠]: “the so-called upright man Dong Fu is obsessed with the unnatural electronic products/wave/radio whereas the crooked Long Jinyu is spellbound by the natural mystery/cicada's sounds/shell fossils²³” (W. T. Liu 1; my translation). From Liu's perspective, what is regarded as science by Dong turns out to be no more *natural* than Long's supernatural ability. Moreover, as Liu continues to point out, the marriage between Dong and Long further blurs the boundary between the natural and the supernatural, pointing ultimately to “the power of creation” (1). Here, the term “the power of creation” refers to the characters' capacity to break out of the old mode and create a new way of understanding the self and the world. In this sense, Dong Fu's experiments with the radio and Long Jinyu's ability to hear particular sound frequencies are testaments to the power of creation. The solid union between Dong and Long then acts as a support system for them to withstand the imposition of normative discourses of identity. As such, the narrator's use of imagination exposes the inadequacy of using merely one prevailing identity discourse to define individuals in society. Thus, the use of imagination forms the basis of the first meaning of historical Sinophonicity articulated in this chapter.

Even though Dong and Long's story has taken place generations ago, the above argument can be applied to the contemporary context of Hong Kong society. The narrator deliberately weaves a comment on the idea of *jiguan* [籍貫; origin of birth] into the narration of Dong and

²³ Shell fossils are depicted in the text as a medium through which Long Jinyu can hear amplified sounds from the nature across time and space.

Long's story: "For younger generations like me who grew up in V-city²⁴, such a thing as a place of origin has probably lost its meaning after Dong Fu's generation" (Dung, *Works* 23). This seemingly random statement can be understood in two ways. For one, it debunks the contemporary myth championed by the nativist ideology that pits Hong Kong against Mainland China. By pointing out that Hong Kong is historically a city of immigrants, the focus is shifted from the dichotomous thinking of Hong Kong identity-versus- mainland Chinese onto Hong Kong's transnational connection with other locations within the global network. For another, by viewing the notion of origin as meaningless in contemporary Hong Kong, the narrator advocates a sense of inclusivity regarding Hong Kong's social and cultural fabric. The inclusive nature of Hong Kong's cityscape is, we might say, at the basis of Hong Kong's dynamic local identity formation. This is an extension of the discussion of historical Sinophonicity above that only one dominant discourse of selfhood cannot adequately describe the full spectrum of humanity living within Hong Kong.

Underlying such discussion of historical Sinophonicity is a sense of urgency on the narrator's part. In his creation of a coherent story about Dong and Long, I argue that the narrator hopes to bring their love story to the public's consciousness. This is related to an ethical imperative that involves an integration of Lukács' and Harris' arguments, as discussed earlier. Dong and Long, in this case, are links to the forgotten ideals of courage and openness that compel one to create new definitions of the self, which is different from the contemporary neoliberal logic of self-fashioning. As the narrator writes, "during the times of the upright man Dong Fu, there still existed relatively innocent ideals, value, and customs. At least, this is how we imagine our ancestor's time. We rely on such a notion to recover things we have lost" (54).

²⁴ V-city is a trope often used in Dung Kai-cheung's works, referring to the city of Victoria, a metaphor for the city of Hong Kong.

The idea of loss is a critique of the moral pathos in contemporary Hong Kong. Dong Fu's upright character should not be viewed as a categorical stereotyping, but as a subversive composite constructed vis-à-vis the moral decline of contemporary times. The narrator's notion of recovering things lost therefore, I argue, means to bring to light hidden stories like Dong's to provoke dialogue about social morality in the public sphere.

The symbolism of Dong and Long's story continues to unfold with the figure of the telegraph in the second chapter "Telegraph/Telephone." The figure of the telegraph is similar in function to that of the radio, as they both involve sending and receiving signals. Dong sends telegraphic messages in lieu of conversing in words with Long. Long hears the electromagnetic waves in the air and deciphers the codes with their private encryption algorithm. The figure of the telephone as suggested by the title, however, is used in contrast with that of the telegraph in this chapter of the novel. As the narrator notes, "when the telephone rings, it means there is somebody waiting on the other end who, be it human or ghost, in this instance, shares a simultaneous existence with us" (51). The immediacy described in the quote is what places the telephone in a more advantageous position to that of the telegraph in terms of modern convenience. Nevertheless, Dong Fu, Dong Xian [the narrator's father] and the narrator's inhibited capacities to express emotions forthrightly makes redundant the function of the telephone. As the narrator subsequently observes, "sometimes things limit an individual's capacity, determine one's destiny, but other times an individual can change the function and usage of certain things, thus creating new meanings for those things and one's own life" (67-8). Expressing thoughts through spoken words might be the narrator's weakness. However, the narrator turns the tables when he writes the words down to communicate his thoughts. As he

contemplates, “it is somewhat a relief for me not able to connect with you [Xu Xu]²⁵ through the telephone. For [through writing to you] I can enjoy the treasured excess [of time and space], and, in the process of *writing imaginatively in the word factory*, I feel at ease to confess to you, and to be with you” (51). The narrator explicitly announces his view on the value of writing, which provides a critical distance for writers to engage with life issues in more creative ways, such as the narrator’s re-construction of his grandparents’ story as delineated above. In the same way as the telegraph functions in Dong and Long’s story, the word factory opens up a space where the literary writer can critique and produce fresh insights on old issues. The previous depiction of Dong and Long’s story is demonstrative of this point.

Similarly, the narrator employs his imaginative faculty to reconstitute his father Dong Xian’s individuality through the figure of the lathe in the third chapter. Compared to Dong Fu, the narrator’s memory of his father is far less remote. This is perhaps why the third chapter is filled with more detailed descriptions of Dong Xian’s life. In the meantime, the narrator’s recollection of his father throws light on Hong Kong’s broader social milieu from the sixties to the nineties. The symbolism of the lathe then constitutes a conceptual framework through which we both access and assess the particularities of Hong Kong’s local identity formation.

In the first place, the evocation of the lathe as a reference to Dong Xian’s personality supplements the inadequacy of the narrator’s characterization of Dong Xian as, quite interestingly, upright. The categorization of being upright here becomes an explicitly normative category that fails to capture the full extent of both Dong Fu’s and Dong Xian’s sense of self. The narrator ponders: “but, when I make an urgent case of Dong Xian succeeding his father’s enterprise, painstakingly pushing for playback of an already irreversible father-son relationship,

²⁵ All the chapters in the first narrative strand of *Works* start with an addressing to Xu Xu, the protagonist in the second narrative strand whom the narrator creates. More will be discussed on this link between two narrative strands in later sections.

am I eliminating their differences with my pen, and over-generalizing their respective individualities?” (86). Dong Fu’s expertise on the radio reflects that he shares the same scientific knowledge base with his son’s profession as a mechanical technician. Additionally, both father and son also have many personality traits in common, such as being down to earth, loyal and quite introverted. It is no surprise that they are easily categorized into the single homogenizing category of being upright. Nevertheless, as the narrator continues to write, “when I do not have a sturdier grasp [of their individualities], I turn to metaphors, willingly believing that the tropes could reveal to us the secrets unobtainable in our experiential reality” (87). The figure of the lathe is chosen as Dong Xian’s profession revolves around it, and is then seen as an extension of him. The narrator observes: “Dong Fu cast his dreams onto the invisible radio waves, but Dong Xian could not even imagine anything beyond a tangible form” (87). Dong Xian’s unimaginative nature is accounted for by his practical mind, which is in line with the image of the heavy lathe. It is in this way that Dong Xian differs largely from his father, who, as discussed above, has a rather creative mind.

In a larger sense, the image of the lathe can be extended to signify the pragmatism of Hong Kong people during the sixties and seventies. In tracing Dong Xian’s experience of growing up, however, the narrator argues for a further consideration of the class factor regarding the formation of pragmatism in Hong Kong. At one point in the text, Dong Xian had to give up his education after primary school due to his father’s financial instability. As a member of an immigrant family from the mainland after the Second World War, Dong Fu suffered from unstable employment and low levels of income. This had arguably been a common situation in Hong Kong society at the time, as the famous 1967 riots had arisen from the unjust treatment of the working class in Hong Kong. As such, Dong Xian’s practical attitude may be explained as a

product of the particular historical time period in which he was situated.

Nevertheless, like Dong Fu, Dong Xian's character cannot be fully understood only through the practical function of the lathe. The transition to a more nuanced understanding of his character is once again smoothed over through the narrator's indication of the value of literary fiction: "As long as we can continue with the story, characters are always transforming, modifiable, and never fixed" (91). As the story continues, Dong's Xian's dull character transforms into one that showcases more emotions regarding issues that he has encountered in life.

This point is evidenced by his bittersweet feeling of buying over-priced food with his low wages, his childhood ambition to make a mother figure toy despite his vague understanding of motherhood, as well as his awkward way of confessing his love to his future wife with a self-made music-box. The section of the narrative with the most symbolic weight lies in Dong Xian's understanding of his profession:

Even though he was only a technician whose job, in its highest capacity, was to manufacture tools in accordance with the clients' instructions, he treated every piece of the job as a work of art. Each design required intelligence, each action demanded craftsmanship, each completion asked for commitment, and each was a piece of art... Art and beauty could be an abstract universal principle, but here was one form of art, one form of beauty that came from a dedication to his practice in real life... if we looked closely enough, if we were to return to childhood curiosity, cutting a nail was in itself magical." (106-7)

In the passage, the workings of the lathe are compartmentalized into different levels of effort. At the same time, the narrator also includes Dong Xian's subjective role in the process. As the two

blend into one, the working of the lathe becomes less of a mechanic engineering but more of an act of creation.

To further expound the quoted passage, in another instance, the narrator links the image of the lathe with that of the word factory mentioned in Dong Fu's story. As Dung Kai-cheung puts it in one interview, a parallel is created between "the lathe which manufactures nails and nail caps and the text which also produces nails and nail caps" (Dung, "In" 100; my translation). The text Dung refers to in the interview is the second narrative strand of *Works* where the protagonist Xu Xu always wears a nail cap around her neck. The parallel between the lathe with writing fiction points to the creative potential that the workings of the lathe entail, which is an aspect that remains invisible too often to the general public. Here, the meaning of historical Sinophonicity is perfectly embodied, as the narrator's re-interpretation of the lathe brings out its aesthetic appeal that differentiates Dong Fu's work/life from others of a similar type. Such an appeal is borne out of Dong Xian's specific character vis-à-vis his life circumstances as an average working-class craftsman in economically prospering Hong Kong. Therefore, the parallel drawn above between the lathe and writing signals fiction's discursive potential to insert an alternative, in this case Cantonese, cultural sensibility into creation of individual identity.

In another talk, Dung mentions that "in the past, people would use an object for the longest time possible, and the object would blend into that person's life" (qtd. in Chau 238; my translation). Here, Dung explicitly highlights the aesthetic agency that objects possess, as they are seen as an extension of human's characteristics. This way of thinking is applicable to the larger picture of Hong Kong's local identity formation. Insofar as Hong Kong people's well-known pragmatism is considered devoid of cultural sensitivity, Dung counters this criticism through suggesting that the workings of the lathe are an act of creation, akin to cultural

production. In this regard, the concept of culture stops merely signifying highbrow artistic activities but is considered as embedded in the customs, tradition, belief and value system of the people's everyday life. Hence, a sorting out of local identity requires an interrogation of the cultural formation in the Sinophone space of Hong Kong.

Even though the use of the lathe is indicative of a particular historical context, its significance is nonetheless still relevant for later generations. Regarding the dimension of class, the image of the lathe is an indicator of the social strata of the working class. In a broader frame, it connotes the other side of Hong Kong's "successful" colonial modernity as stated in the master narrative, such as the unequal distribution of resources. But the tenacity and strife that lower-class Hong Kong people exhibit in the face of adversity is not laid out in sufficient length in Dung's work. This important aspect of Hong Kong's social formation will be put to the fore in the next chapter when the concept of gendered Sinophonocity is introduced. Nevertheless, the mention of class issues here is commendable as it is a necessary topic of the decolonization of Hong Kong. As an effective way of recognizing the complexity of Hong Kong's colonial legacy—namely that it also produced an underclass, symbols such as the lathe reflect the multifacetedness of everyday life.

Dong Xian's story ends with the lathe's retirement due to the closing down of his factory shop. The narrator writes at the very end of the third chapter: "the lathe cuts the nails, in the same way as I'm working on my words, gradually presenting to you the image of my inner self, in front of my desk, on my paper, during the production process of the word factory, under the light of the forty-watt lamp that holds my special memory" (Dung, *Works* 108). The word factory functions as the narrator's reference to his own writing of his family history in *Works*. The quote thus serves as a transitive sentence, anticipating that the narration continues with the

focus now shifting to the narrator himself. More importantly, I argue that his words foresee a shift in strategy regarding the construction of the meaning of historical Sinophonicity. For the relationship between the narrator, as a pen worker, and the artifacts is bound to differ greatly from what is told from Dong Fu's and Dong Xian's stories. To resist the domination of any single identity formation discourse, the narrator needs to reterritorialize the meanings of the artifacts with different strategies. Accordingly, the analysis in the next section will examine these different strategies by focusing on the narrator's experience in growing up.

2.1.2 The Narrator's Story— Redemption and the Child Self

In Dong Fu's and Dong Xian's stories, the figures of the artifacts are imagined as the embodiment of their selfhood in order to foreground the neglected aspects of their individuality. In this section, the analysis investigates how the figures of the artifacts creatively act as lenses through which the narrator's original perception of selfhood and reality is critiqued. In doing so, the narrative that is focalized around those artifacts forges an alternate version of the narrator's experience. Such an analysis adds new layers to the meaning of historical Sinophonicity with regard to its intervention in existing perceptions of identity formation.

In the fourth chapter entitled "Sewing Machines," the narrator first experiences his sexual awakening. The experience is accompanied by acts of violence and feelings of guilt and fear. The narrator begins the chapter with his memory of helping his mother make cloth dolls using a sewing machine. The process of making cloth dolls ushers him into an understanding of the female anatomy. For a heterosexual male, the cloth doll represents temptation, submissiveness and a site for execution of violence: "In one afternoon when nobody else was home, I forgot how this perfect crime time came about. I removed the checkered skirt on the cloth doll with my shaky hands. Without any resistance it let me strip it naked" (130). Following such an act is the

narrator's self-condemnation, which leads to a distortion of his perceptions: "Whatever eccentric and nasty positions to which I made the naked body conform, it always flashed its curved smiling lips to me without a flinch, at times suggesting a complicit smirk, yet other times feeling like evil ridicule" (130). The secrecy involved in playing with the cloth doll magnifies the narrator's sense of shame disguised as paranoia in the above quote.

At the same time, there is a burgeoning sense of empowerment on the narrator's part in manipulating the doll's actions. His act intimates his innermost desire to dominate and control another being. The paranoia of feeling the doll's smirk or ridicule then escalates into the narrator's wicked desire to destroy and penetrate. Here, Dung Kai-cheung pens visceral detail regarding the narrator's violation of the doll's body, which is as deeply disturbing as it is sexual. The narrator uses a pair of scissors to tear apart the doll's lower body: "I wanted to see what was inside the *void*. It broke open. Pulled out from the inside was cotton. Snow-white cotton" (130). The word "void" is a vaginal reference to the female sex of the cloth doll. The snow-white cotton that emerges from the doll can be metaphoric of semen that exits the female body after the sexual act. In a way, the focus on gender as a starter to introduce the young narrator's life story underlines how the dimension of gender is a primary site for analysis of individual subject formation, known here as Sinophonicity. The private nature of the above-quoted scene is also telling of the intricacies of the workings of desire pertaining to sexuality and gender. Viewed from an enlarged perspective, the voiceless cloth doll provides a portrait of the lived reality of the disenfranchised community—racial, ethnic, lower-class, and so forth—in society, with varying degrees of oppression to which they are subjected.

A few pages further into the fourth chapter, the narrator recalls another gruesome spectacle of an injured girl in a hospital where the narrator is being treated for a heat burn on his

left hand. The girl patient is described as lying naked on a gurney, with her body parts randomly sewed together and her skin covered in red-blood lines. The similarity of this scene to the cloth doll incident transports the narrator into a state of *déjà vu*: “Further and further away, the gurney turned into a big sewing machine. The girl lying on the working table in a deformed bodily position showed her twisted face under the right angle and light” (136). The narrator’s fantastical perception of this gruesome scene shows the capacity of his imagination to convey a sense of incomprehensible fear of the amount of violence that can be exerted on a gendered body. The girl in the scene is believed by the narrator to be Xiao Ling, a girl living next door to the narrator’s family. Xiao Ling’s story is another one of sexual violation and brutality, which will be analyzed in subsequent sections. Nonetheless, in the narrator’s descriptions of the acts of violence done to both of the cloth doll and the girl on the gurney, both of his fantastical imaginations focus on their twisted facial expression. I contend that the “twisted” expression is a metaphor for the resistant spirit of the disenfranchised people. Especially in the doll’s story, it is the doll’s resistant spirit that leads the narrator to enact violence upon it. The image of the twisted face thus reflects the necessary bravery and cost of resistance for the downtrodden. Such a point of view stems out of a retrospective examination of the narrator’s subjectivity by himself, which is precisely the first meaning of historical Sinophonicity that advocates a subversion of the dominant modes of knowledge production in shaping the local subject in Hong Kong.

The narrator further identifies the imperative to commemorate the struggles of the downtrodden as a fight against the unequal power dynamics within society. At the beginning of the fourth chapter, the narrator briefly mentions the different living modalities that he and his parents’ generations experienced living in urban Hong Kong. According to him, “[w]e were lucky to live in an age when all misfortunes were shouldered by our parents. We were the first

generation of the spoiled kids. The generations after us would only become more and more so, asking us for even greater happiness and contentment in life” (128). Underlying the narrator’s words is his critique of the generational amnesia of past struggles and hardship endured by Hong Kong people. However, the cloth doll’s story suggests another aspect of the spoiled life of the narrator’s generation, as it exposes the ubiquity of unfair power relations that are at play in everyday life. Such a generational amnesia, in the narrator’s opinion, is the result of the prevalence of the master narrative in Hong Kong’s official historical discourse that proposes a homogenizing trajectory of life in a place growing from a fishing village to a metropolis. From the 1970s onwards, Hong Kong’s modernity has been summed up as a narrative of its success as an economic miracle. This master narrative champions the sweat and pain that regular people like the narrator’s parents have endured in the making of Hong Kong’s success. In the process of privileging the economic aspect of its success, such a master narrative willfully neglects the unequal and unfair distribution of resources among the rich and poor. As the new generations are subsequently brought up in affluence, they are sheltered from the unglamorous aspects of life that their predecessors have endured. Thereafter, the younger generations are likely to easily internalize such a homogenizing narrative of the successful Hong Kong self, as they have not endured the same extent of labor and injustice as the elder generations have. As the narrator muses, “the inherent crooked nature had already been tamed by the regularizing rhythm of normative living and studies... We should not underestimate any measures of normalization, for it was uncannily powerful” (120). The term “crooked nature” brings to mind the character disposition of the narrator’s grandmother, Long Jinyu whereby Long’s crooked character leads to an openness to creating new definitions of herself. The narrator’s words here are a call for precaution that we should be aware of the different social circumstances under which Hong

Kong people live. In the meantime, we should critically examine the effect of the normalizing discourse on subject formation, as the normalizing discourse erases the experiences of injustice in life. The cloth doll's story is arguably the narrator's reflection of the effect of normalization on his early self. Unwittingly the narrator's younger self becomes an arbiter of power vis-à-vis the cloth doll.

At the end of the story of the girl on the hospital gurney, the narrator's perspective shifts into a more mature one. He compels us to look at brutality as a necessary part of the resistance against normalization: "I played the boy, and also the girl... The girl experienced the pains of shame and cutting herself, yet at the same time, she sewed herself together in a Frankenstein-like manner. Perhaps we needed to bleed ourselves, tear ourselves up, grow horns on foreheads, and deform our bodies, so that we could have the possibility of being the final winners" (137). The first sentence of the quote touches upon the medium of writing as a way to perform and experience brutality. In the process of the narration, the narrator merges his role as the exerciser of power with that of a tenacious fighter, as represented by both the doll and the girl on the gurney. Brutality, in this regard, is not merely the effect of physical oppression against the downtrodden. It also describes the experience of the oppressor, the narrator in this case when his previous knowledge of selfhood is being dismantled. As a result, he fulfills his "intent of self-redemption through writing" (Sun 21; my translation). The narrator's intent to attain redemption compels him to construct an alternate account of his younger self. In this alternative account, the narrator reflects on his own wrongdoings, as well as the systematic problems of the unequal power structure operating within Hong Kong society. Such an approach differs greatly from what is seen in Dong Fu's and Dong Xian's stories, as it adds new layers of expression to the meaning of historical Sinophonicity regarding the resistance of dominant discourses on identity formation.

More importantly, the narrator's bravery involved in his re-living of his horrifying childhood memories through writing also counts as an act of bleeding and self-deformation on his part. To echo his own words, the materiality of writing thus becomes his tactic against hegemonic forms of normalization.

The narrator's act of redeeming himself through his writing continues in the recount of Xiao Ling's story. In the fourth chapter, Xiao Ling is depicted as a fifteen-year-old aspiring fashion designer. She often sews fabrics of different colors together to make a single piece of clothing. In the young narrator's eyes, her behavior is deemed to be on the verge of mental breakdown. Later, her disappearance from everyone's sight is soon connected by the narrator to the spectacle of the girl on the hospital gurney at the end of her life. It is only in the next chapter titled "Television" that her life story is gradually revealed with more grim details. Specifically, in this chapter, the narrator focuses on the figure of the television as a window that connects two independent worlds. In other words, what is shown on the screen of the television is deemed a separate world from the world of the television watchers. As the narrator is facing the television's screen, the image reflected on the screen is seen by him as a separate entity: "When I talk about my child self, I always can't address him as 'me.' So I look down from high above in the air on him, a little boy with a ghosting image made of black and white colors and even larger areas of ambiguous grey" (Dung, *Works* 154-5). Here, the narrator uses the same narrative strategy as in the story of the cloth doll whereby the narrating subject confronts the experiencing narrator. The ghosting image is the younger narrator who is viewed by the writer-narrator. In telling Xiao Ling's story, the focalization shifts in-between that of the narrator's younger self and his writer-self. The adoption of this back and forth narrative style thus makes it possible for the narrator to critique Xiao Ling's traumatic experience as delineated in the following

paragraph.

The narrator's recount involves Xiao Ling's experiences with sexual violation. It includes two incidents, one with her middle-aged neighbor Qian, and the other with Ah Yao. In the first incident, the focalization mainly remains with the child narrator who is sitting in a room with Xiao Ling. As he approaches the TV, the writing is angled through the eyes of both the child and his reflection: "*This me*, translucent, walked slowly towards the screen, getting bigger and bigger, until at the invisible boundary separating the worlds of the living and dead, *this me* met up with *that me*" (164). The use of "this" and "that" communicates a sense of wonder one feels when seeing one's reflection on a screen. With such a level of concentration on his reflected self, the child naturally loses track of Xiao Ling. The writing only gives us one line to indicate her whereabouts: "In Qian's room next door came muffled murmurs of pain" (165). The sentence intentionally sends an ambiguous message regarding Xiao Ling's connection to the murmurs. Her presence is only indicated in the text by Xiao Ling's act of sewing colorful clothing and her neighbor Qian's sudden moving out of the apartment building. In a way, this ambiguity adds to the intensity of Xiao Ling's suffering, as the child narrator's obliviousness speaks to her sense of helplessness.

The second incident is a more straightforward illustration of what Xiao Ling might have suffered in Qian's room. The villain, in this case, is Xiao Ling's adopted brother Ah Yao, who is a spoilt brat. Ah Yao has been a bully to the young narrator for a while, and has had always scared him with ghost stories. Xiao Ling, as usual, comes to the child's rescue, holding him in her arms away from Ah Yao. The incident happens in one of the settings where Xiao Ling is holding the narrator and watching television with him. After ignoring Ah Yao's demands, the supposed sibling fight escalates into an attempted sexual assault.

Hearing this, Ah Yao jumped up all of a sudden, taking a flying kick forcibly at the TV cabinet, resembling the masked Superman in the anime. The image on the screen immediately disappeared, turning into chaotic black and white static...

As a result, *that me* on the TV was then able to see the outside image through the newly opened window...

Xiao Ling, standing in the center of the image, grabbed the soft cushion pillow on the chair and tossed it towards Ah Yao who was outside of the image. *This me*, frightened, hid in the left corner of the frame, with only half body visible in sight. After a few exchanges of obscenities, Ah Yao leaped into the frame, lounged onto Xiao Ling's body and started pulling her hair... Ah Yao, wielding his ape-like strong arms, tried to gain the control of her body, ruthlessly tearing off her clothes... Xiao Ling had lost all her strength to fight back, only to curl up her fragile spine that speaks all her sorrow, stubbornly covering her body with her arms as if her life depends on it...

This me, standing behind Ah Yao, seemingly innocent, attended to this act of violence with open gazes... *That me* desperately struck back with a final kick, violently knocking *this me* on the mouth." (170-1)

The focalization in the above passages switches from initially the child's, "*this me*," to the writer's, "*that me*." Like in the first incident, the young child self's incapacity to stop the brutality intensifies the extent of Xiao Ling's misery. Insofar as the young child cannot fully comprehend such a situation, the writer-self takes over with the narration of the main part of the sexual assault. In the meantime, the writer-self simultaneously condemns the inaction on the

child's part. As such, the act of writing becomes the narrator's process of redeeming himself through articulating his younger self's cowardice and guilt.

Furthermore, the narrator uses Xiao Ling's story to open up a discussion of a larger issue of an ongoing anti-mainland sentiment in Hong Kong. Dung Kai-cheung once commented that a writer needs to "bring to fore all kinds of vulnerabilities and embarrassment experienced by himself, and incorporate them into the predicaments and dangers of an era, instead of making judgments and criticism in a transcendental manner" (Dung, *Writing* 508; my translation). Dung believes that personal struggles are symptomatic of larger social issues. Ensuing from Xiao Ling's story is the narrator's attention to the fervent China-vs-Hong Kong discussion in public discourse. Specifically, near the end of the chapter "Television," the narrator talks of an anti-mainland sentiment rampant in Hong Kong's public sphere after the 1997 handover which he connects to the downfall of Hong Kong's economy and its vast inflow of migrants from the mainland. What is interesting in this prevailing discriminatory sentiment is a similar triangular relation found in Xiao Ling's story. The triangle in Xiao Ling's story consists of Ah Yao, Xiao Ling, and the silent bystander: the narrator's child self. Similarly, the China-vs-Hong Kong discussion is played out in Hong Kong mainly by three ideological groups: the nativist group, the pro-Beijing group, and what I call the silent apathetic. However, I do not intend to draw a parallel between Ah Yao-versus-Yao Ling and China-versus-Hong Kong, which easily leads to the conventional postcolonial trap of treating Hong Kong as a weak/feminized party. The prevalence of the anti-mainland sentiment is the result of two competing political ideologies in Hong Kong, namely the nativist and the pro-Beijing ones. Yet such a view of the conflict subsequently renders the existence of the third party, the silent apathetic, invisible, when this group of people have the potential to develop alternative thinking on Hong Kong's local identity

if given enough stimuli. My analysis will instead highlight Dung's language used to depict the silent bystander, as this is where historical Sinophonicity works its potential.

Specifically, the narrator views the medium of the television as the main contributor to the birth of the silent apathetic. As he holds, "the ghost really disappeared, not after Ah Yao was sent away for good, but after the black-and-white TV was replaced by a color one...The unrest in the city dissipated slowly, the working-class replaced by the nouveau middle class...The television made us bystanders, numbed, and apathetic" (Dung, *Works* 172-6). The ghost, despite being imagined, provides a critical distance from which the narrator critiques the vices of everyday life. Through such a reflexive device, the narrator is able to showcase the helpless situations experienced by Xiao Ling. However, such a device becomes unseen with the bombardment of visual and auditory information provided by the color TV. As Hee Wai-siam contends, "color TV acts like an exorcist tool for capitalism. It replaces the entire global proletariat revolutions in the sixties and seventies with the illusion of a halcyon world of singing and dancing" (Hee 19; my translation). Insofar as the advent of the color TV has brought forth an abundance of information that potentially dulls our imaginative senses, as a result, people lose their critical capacity to examine social phenomena. The color TV has then become a medium through which the normalizing discourse of identity, history, and culture is dispensed. As Hee remarks again, "the image of selfhood created on public channels is now absorbed into the perception of the Hong Kong self in people's quotidian life" (19). The consequence of being absorbed into this homogenizing discourse of the self has produced the silent apathetic. As more and more people lose the ability to think critically as evidenced in the text, the China-vs-Hong Kong discussion thus dominates within public discourse through its reification by the two competing ideologies.

In this regard, that the narrator uses the instrument of writing to redeem himself in the case of Xiao Ling's story accurately presents what historical Sinophonicity can do. The device of the ghost is an act of re-creation, a way to write over the singular official discourse of identity and history. At the very end of the "Television" chapter, the narrator comments on the nostalgia fever among local Hong Kongers for the golden era of the 1980s and 1990s: "We had once lived in too dark a world, but now we were actually feeding ourselves on nostalgia for this dark world, only to embellish our fake sense of lightness" (Dung, *Works* 179). In the midst of now much-politicized disputes over Hong Kong's local identity, many discourses are rooted in this made-up nostalgia for Hong Kong's colonial modernity. As the narrator points out, such acts unwittingly neglect the struggles and sufferings that many Hong Kong people of past generations endured during that period. Literary fiction then creates a critical distance from which different versions of those lived experiences are produced and articulated. As many residual problems, including the China-vs-Hong Kong discussion, have sifted through to our current times, the concept of historical Sinophonicity becomes extremely important. Historical Sinophonicity, in this case, serves as an ethical imperative, as well as an effective epistemological means, to remind us that we need to think of Hong Kong's past critically and afresh, in order to better position ourselves in relation to the present and future.

2.1.3 The Narrator's Story— Writing, Growing Up and Possible Worlds

The last section argued for a notion of historical Sinophonicity that sees writing as an effective way to problematize the processes of subject formation that are often invisible in public discourse. These processes, as discussed, have a far-reaching impact on our own subject positions regarding contemporary issues. This section furthers this line of thinking by focusing on how the narrator of *Works* uses his writing to create a multiplicity of realities to undermine

the dominance of any singular discourse on identity and history. Such a notion of historical Sinophonicity then manifests itself in the notion of possible worlds in the remaining six chapters of the first narrative strand.

In the chapter “Cars,” the narrator connects the function of cars to that of the writing of this chapter. In a similar way as one drives a vehicle to reach a certain destination, “the existence of this chapter is, probably, to lead to other different destinations” (219). The plural form of the word “destinations” is intentional, in that it arguably links readers to the notion of possible worlds. Plainly put, the notion of possible worlds suggests that the universe is composed of multiple parallel worlds, which can be brought into being through the act of writing. For instance, one of the most central threads running through *Works* is the narrator’s unrequited love for his high school crush Ru Zhen. In fact, the genesis of *Works* could be argued as the narrator’s attempt to deal with the rejection of his love by Ru Zhen. How the narrator will eventually react toward the situations in his life is likely to remain unknown, and is thereby full of possibilities, until the end of the novel.

As the narrator traces his experience of growing up through the figures of the artifacts, he simultaneously constructs an alternate understanding of himself and the surrounding world. The notion of possible worlds shows that the writing of *Works* acknowledges several possible bifurcating routes, where any single perspective that the narrator takes leads to different life experiences later. In another instance, the narrator’s intent of redeeming his wrongdoings as discussed in the previous section is one manifestation of how he copes with his rejected emotions. By engaging in double focalizations—the experiencing narrator’s and that of the narrating subject—the narrator’s construction of a different version of Xiao Ling’s traumatic experience can be viewed as one of the possible worlds. The notion of possible worlds thus

implies an effective way of resisting the dominance of single master narrative about Hong Kong's history and identity.

This notion of multiple parallel worlds is further explicated in the chapter "Watches" where the narrator points out the technically unavoidable differences regarding how time is displayed on mechanic watches. His observation illustrates the co-existence of parallel worlds. As the narrator argues, "the worlds of watches are the perfect embodiment of all possible worlds co-existing in time and space. We can imagine a clock shop as the cosmos, each clock therein as a star. Although they are operating on the same [physical] principles, some stars move fast, some slowly, some staying still, while some just born" (282). The narrator's description of different iterations of space-time coexisting within one single universe is a vivid one. Like how the clock watch in the shop exists as a singular entity, each particular coordination of space-time constitutes an independently functional world. This point is in line with Gary Morson's understanding of time as "a field of possibilities" (Morson 119). Morson notes that "[t]ime ramifies, and the present we know is one of many possible presents. Every actual moment could have been other, and it could lead to many possible futures, some more likely than others, but none inevitable, as often appears" (119). Morson's argument on multiple possible presents can be applied to justify the narrator's critique that *Works* makes about the master historical narrative of Hong Kong by constructing an alternate story of his (grand)parents with imagination. In the cases of Dong Fu's and Dong Xian's stories, the instrument of imaginative writing opens up alternative presents, in which the two characters' individualities are expressed to be more than just the simplistic categories they are pigeonholed in. In this fashion, Hong Kong's local identity formation is viewed as dynamic and inclusive of different representations.

The notion of possible worlds is, therefore, an extension of historical Sinophonicity in its

effort to subvert the dominance of a single master narrative about identity formation in Hong Kong. It is a necessary reminder that the critique made by the narrator in *Works* cannot be the only available way of approaching the issue of identity and history in Hong Kong. In a similar vein, the narrator's own experience of growing up cannot singularly represent the living situation of his entire generation. Hence, the notion of possible worlds elicits a kaleidoscopic perspective regarding Hong Kong's way of life. The multiplicity of narratives accompanied by such a kaleidoscopic perspective then captures the complexity, variety of emotions, and dynamism of Hong Kong's urbanity and modernity. In this way, "history is cracked open, as the author offers us more romantic and even richer insights" (Y. X. Liu 1; my translation). However, it can be argued that from the narration of each chapter of *Works* we can attain a glimpse of some aspects of the collective experience of Hong Kong, where people from similar social, ethnic, cultural, gender, educational, or ideological background share commonalities in their perception of selfhood. As such, the narration of *Works*, embedded within the notion of possible worlds, can be read with an acknowledgement of the tension regarding aiming for attaining both a collective and a particular lived experience of the Hong Kong self.

In this concern, the rest of the analysis in this section will press further into the complexity of the living circumstances for the narrator's generation in Hong Kong. The stories narrated are primarily concerned with the narrator's encounters with females during his formative years. These encounters are reflections of the narrator's perception of his own selfhood as he confronts the issues of sexuality, love, and violence. The stories are at once about redemption and heartbreak. In the chapter "Cars," the narrator utilizes the trope of nausea to describe his past with a girl named Ah Jie. Ah Jie, nicknamed by the narrator as the trash girl, is said to often vomit inside the narrator's family's car. The Sartrean imagery of nausea reflects her

hidden negative feelings about the narrator's family well, particularly her unhappiness with the narrator himself. However, the more detailed history between them is only revealed in the following chapter, "Game Consoles." Ah Jie's nickname "trash girl" was given to her because her single mother is a waste collector. Her mother's time-demanding job leaves her in the narrator's family's care during the daytime. The disdainful connotation and Ah Jie's silent acceptance of that nickname add to our understanding of her overall situation. It is then not difficult to link her experience at the narrator's home with her habit of vomiting in his family's car. Her vomiting act can be interpreted as a viscera expression of her timidity, frustration and to some extent her distress over residing in a foreign environment. This argument is evidenced by the narrator's violent conduct toward Ah Jie during that period of time, which is further discussed in the following paragraph.

The narrator's violence is executed discreetly upon Ah Jie in the guise of a game. In a way, the central trope of the chapter which is stated in its title, "Game Consoles," which epitomizes the irony contained within. The putative nature of games often grants impunity for any violent act exercised during the moment of play. However, through the breaking down of the elements of a gaming program, the narrator overthrows the old perception that games are innocent activities. Instead, he sees every game as an exercise involving conquest, bloodshed, or other forms of physical violence. Such a critique is also extended to a real-life scenario in which some physical games are acted out. The narrator's story in this chapter concerns a game called "the war game" he played with Ah Jie. How the game is entitled already betrays a sense of cruelty from the beginning. According to its mechanics, Ah Jie is supposed to play against the narrator and his brother as two competing camps. However, she soon loses the upper hand due to her weak physique. The game turns into a one-sided punishment on her:

I wielded my handmade crossbow, with its accurate aiming and strong force, and targeted specifically towards the trash girl's exposed arms or legs. ...

Accompanying the loud shooting noise was her convulsing body due to the pain, and muffled cries. This usually gave me more stimulation... After the enemy was captured, which was the inevitable result of each battle, the captive, hands tied, would be sent for execution in the bathroom where she would get thrashed again by the water gun as punishment. ... I still remember how she cocked her face sideways, eyes squinted, accepting the pain of water splashes entering her eyes and nostrils. (Dung, *Works* 249-250)

The narrator's attention to Ah Jie's bodily reaction transposes the supposed innocent nature of the game into an exposé on the costs of a meaningless war. The experiencing "I" and the narrating self in the passage merge into one. Hence, we can at once read the extent of brutality a young boy has achieved, as well as feel his repentance through the words that describe his actions, which yields a more affective reading experience. In doing so, we are led to another of the narrator's strategy in his reappropriation of the meanings of artifacts, which is to imagine the experiences of the oppressed to reveal firsthand the effect his conduct as the oppressor has on females such as Ah Jie. Coupled with my previous analysis of the narrator's strategies, this strategy showcases the full extent of the capacity of the notion of historical Sinophonicity to destabilize the existing modes of knowledge about identity formation in official discourse. This act of destabilization is, I contend, an act of decolonization as delineated at the beginning of this chapter.

To return to the quoted instance above, compared to the violence that Xiao Ling had endured, the violence inherent in a game is at face value far less serious and condemnable.

Nevertheless, the attention to the optical, audio and tactile reception of the violence enacted upon Ah Jie speaks volumes of the seriousness of this incident. The dramatization of the violence that Ah Jie endures pushes us to confront a much bigger problem, that of the internalization of normative masculine discourse in society. Unlike the story of the cloth doll, in this incident, the narrator is old enough to possess basic knowledge about the workings of gender and sex. The war game in this context is a reiteration of the dominant masculinist discourse on gender behavior, which promotes the stereotypical conception of masculinity as one of aggression and domination. In the text, one main reason for the narrator's obsession with war games is his urge to fit into the masculine stereotype heralded by his peers. The game encourages the spirit of conquest, even at the expense of spreading brutality onto others. By executing violence in the name of conquest on Ah Jie, the narrator unwittingly participates in the process of the distribution and circulation of the masculinist discourse of selfhood.

Masculinist knowledge production occurs at a far more regular frequency in contemporary Hong Kong society compared to the narrator's, due to the mass production and distribution of cultural products such as game consoles. This argument may seem like a stretch here, but the implication of such a mode of knowledge production is worth pondering over, particularly in the context of Hong Kong's historiographic writing. Ah Jie's story can be easily understood through the binary structure of the glorified master [the narrator]-vs-the voiceless sufferer [Ah Jie]. However, it suffices to say that Hong Kong's history is far more complex than what a simple binary opposition provides. By virtue of this, the issue at hand then becomes: how can one write a kaleidoscopic history of Hong Kong that simultaneously celebrates its achievements and critiques its deficiencies? For Dung Kai-cheung, such a question boils down to a literary one. To illustrate this point, we come back to the chapter "Cars." Bearing Ah Jie's story

in mind, the trope of nausea has now gained a new level of signification for the narrator. As the narration goes on, it is not only Ah Jie but also the narrator himself who often vomits in cars. The cars in which he throws up are owned by his rich classmates. His only contact with them is when he is invited to sit in their cars. The irony here is certainly magnified as his nausea only seems to act up when he is in these specific cars. As the narrator writes, “I suspected I was cursed, a curse spelled by that trash girl. It was karma for all the wicked deeds I had done to her during her stay at my house. ... I was certain I would never be able to ride normally in a private car” (211). The discomfort caused by the sight of nausea is made to contrast against any positive feeling the narrator may have had for luxurious modern cars. Nausea is not simply a sign of the narrator’s physical illness, but also a sickening reaction to the narrator’s stress with his need to conform. This is attested to by the fact that the narrator’s rich classmates are often poking fun at his lack of stereotypical masculine characteristics. In these instances, the narrator becomes the victim like Ah Jie in the war game. Accordingly, the narrator experiences the roles of being both the giver as well as the receiver of violence. Being the recipient of violence is a further development of the narrator’s discussion of redeeming himself through the act of writing in the case of the cloth doll. Here, the tactics of imagining for the oppressed become an entry point through which we examine the complexity of Hong Kong’s urban life.

In the last two remaining chapters of the first narrative strand, the narrator touches upon the genesis of his decision to become a writer. Throughout the previous chapters, the narrator has implicitly revealed his view of the value of literary writing. These two last chapters are a summary of his discussion, but with some new additional notes. The main stories of the two chapters are about two of the narrator’s failed attempts at romance, one with the Volvo girl, the other Ru Zhen. In the chapter entitled “Cameras,” the character of the Volvo girl is named as

such due to the fact that she always comes into the narrator's sight in a Volvo car. The absence of the girl's real name is indicative of the secretive nature of the narrator's feelings such that he acts like a stalker to take photos of her. In lieu of real conversations, the narrator seeks recourse by taking numerous photos of the Volvo girl while she is in sight. However, when the photos are developed, the stares he directs at them become uncontrollably sexual. As the narrator confesses, "I did not know that taking photos could lead to this complete destruction" (393). Here, the narrator is talking about his sense of shame that arises from his sexual desire towards the Volvo girl. The desire is aroused by his close observation of the girl's specific body parts. What emerges from the narrator's candid confession is his musing on his obsession with artifacts. His sexual desire towards the photos of the Volvo girl is a manifestation of such an obsession.

The obsession is soon translated into a metaphysical musing of the relationship between man-made objects and nature. The two parties are usually conceived as binary opposition to each other. However, according to the narrator, "perhaps in the murky territory between the boundaries of humans and objects, the natural and man-made, materiality and spirituality, natural history and civilizational history, exists our sexuality" (401-2). The dichotomies in the quotation are postulated in our conventional way of conceiving these concepts. The narrator nonetheless dispels these dichotomies by pointing out a common ground that the two opposed concepts share, which is sexuality. The notion of sexuality here especially pertains to the idea of creation. As such, the narrator shows that we can approach the above quoted opposing concepts from the perspective of creation (of either knowledge or physical objects). The idea of creation is essential to understanding this novel. In the chapter "Watches," the narrator has revealed his motivation behind creating this novel: "It would be a novel about all laws, natural laws, mechanical laws, physical laws, ... also laws about characters, and laws about the novel. It would be about the

budding of the fiction, the inception of the real, the origin of the novel, and the birth of life” (304). In these poetic languages, we are explicitly told to read the novel as a book about creation. More specifically, it is about the creation of the knowledge of identity and history. How selfhood is perceived and how history is narrated have been repeatedly discussed in the analysis of *Works* given in this chapter here. The construction of historical Sinophonicity is also an inquiry into the conceptualization of a Hong Kong self as a historical entity.

To expand the above argument further, we should recall that *Works* is a part of Dung Kai-cheung’s *Natural History Trilogy* mentioned at the beginning of the textual analysis. David Der-wei Wang comments that, “[t]he paradox of Dung’s *Natural History* trilogy is that it is actually a ‘history of creation’ that tells how nature has been ‘humanised’— how it has moved from being nature as it was at the dawn of time to nature that has *become* nature through custom and habit” (Wang, “A Hong Kong” 82). Wang views that in Dung’s novels such as *Works*, human activity operates on a similar principle to natural creation. There is more commonality than difference between these two processes of creation. Regarding man-made objects such as photographs in the case of the Volvo girl, the photos are imbued with meanings by humans, i.e., the narrator. A photograph is only “a two-dimensional world and hence not of the order of representation, which is three-dimensional” (Baudrillard 65). The meaning of a photograph is always external as it serves to represent a certain narrative of reality (hence, three-dimensional). Upon seeing the Volvo girl’s photos, the narrator’s shame translates into his resistance in projecting his desire upon these photos, as it distorts the girl into a sexualized object. Similarly, near the end of this chapter, the narrator makes an explicit critique of the abuse involved in bringing up photos of Hong Kong’s past scenes to conjure up stereotypical feelings of nostalgia. As such, understanding the workings of the creation of knowledge is necessary to counter the imposition

of a dominant perception of reality.

The narrator considers literary writing as an effective counter-tactic. As he notes, “in my small word factory, I continued to silently manufacture little handiwork deemed unfit to represent our time” (Dung, *Works* 409). These humble words have two tiers of meaning. For one, they underline the decreasing influence of literature in constructing popular perceptions of Hong Kong’s local identity. For another, the words contain an ethical imperative to voice the diverse lifeways of struggle and strife of the everyday person in society for the genre of literary fiction (historical fiction included) whose aesthetics are reflection of Hong Kong’s particular circumstances. The “unfit” literary writing that occurs within the narrator’s word factory is meant to destabilize our existing knowledge system. Nevertheless, we can glean a sense of hopefulness from the narrator’s commitment to producing literature that provides alternate understandings of Hong Kong. The affective rendering of the narrator’s family history in *Works* is illustrative of this point.

However, there is still a limit to what the genre of historical fiction can do. Historical fiction cannot willfully change certain outcomes of events; it could only articulate an alternate perspective of it. In the last chapter titled “Cassette Players,” the narrator finally relays the details of his story with Ru Zhen. In the very beginning of the novel, the narrator has revealed to us that this is a failed romance. This is perhaps why the final narration feels a bit anti-climactic, as they already know the story’s outcome in terms of plot. In this chapter “Cassette Players,” the figure of the cassette player is understood for its function set up an invisible wall between people. Ironically, cassette tapes act as a medium through which the narrator’s life intersects with Ru Zhen’s.

Ru Zhen is a classical music lover who aspires to become a singer of this genre in the

future. The narrator and Ru Zhen first start as friends connected through the hobby of music and after the narrator realizes his feelings for her, Ru Zhen gradually pulls away from him when his feelings become quite overt. The narrator eventually chooses to confess his love on a cassette tape, which Ru Zhen later returns to him. Unlike the photos of the Volvo girl, the narrator's memory of Ru Zhen is devoid of any sexual desire. The cassette tape, the only memorabilia of their relationship, is "in fact a reverberation of my own voice bounced back from that *invisible wall*" (454). However, I contend that it is precisely the act of writing with the absence of sexual desire that helps the narrator to come to terms with his frustrated love for Ru Zhen in the end. Instead of feelings of redemption, the recount of his story with Ru Zhen has a friendly tone. It is a sign of his peace of mind in his journey of learning what love is. Near the end of the chapter, the narrator reveals that Ru Zhen eventually forfeits her music aspirations, and changes her major to economics in college. As he says ruefully, "perhaps, I did not have any right to forgive Ru Zhen leaving me, but I would never forgive her abandoning music, literature, poetry and love" (451). A sense of betrayal is aroused in the narrator's regard for Ru Zhen's music choice, which renders a final closure to the narrator's love of her.

Ru Zhen's story might have ended, but her legacy continues with its far-reaching impact on the narrator's consciousness. The formation of this whole novel, as I have pointed out, largely draws its creative energy from the narrator's unrequited romantic feelings for Ru Zhen. In a way, Ru Zhen's story pushes him to reflect on who he is. At the same time, his introspection, as narrated in this chapter, connotes the dynamic process of redeeming his past woes. In doing so, the writing of *Works* showcases the "elided potentialities" of the genre of historical fiction, the most salient representative of which is the notion of possible worlds. It is from this point that the narrative transitions to its second narrative strand, with Xu Xu as its main protagonist. Xu Xu's

story arguably works as a way of compensating for lost love. Nonetheless, as the narrator mentions, “the so-called compensation here is only meant as a possibility” (457). The meaning of compensation thus can be understood as a continuation of the treasured qualities that the narrator has first gleaned from Ru Zhen and then projects them onto the character of Xu Xu. As I will argue later, Xu Xu’s story is meant to promote far more than nostalgia for a glorified Hong Kong in the past. Xu Xu’s story is another demonstration of the narrator’s musings on the workings of the creation of the knowledge of self, as well as how history is written and coded. As such, the next section discusses how the workings of knowledge creation continue to function in Xu Xu’s story. The relationship between the two narrative strands will also be a central concern in the analysis, as it is an important aspect of the meaning of historical Sinophonicity.

2.2 Of the Present—Xu Xu and the World of Person-objects

2.2.1 Xu Xu’s Story and Its Link to the Past

As stated in the last paragraph, the second narrative strand is a political analogy for the workings of contemporary Hong Kong society. As such, the analysis will be focused on the ways the issue of identity formation in contemporary Hong Kong is configured and scrutinized through the protagonist Xu Xu’s story. Xu Xu’s journey is one of self-discovery in a world of person-objects. Since Xu Xu’s character is modeled on the narrator’s impression of Ru Zhen, her story is engaged in a dialogic relationship with the first narrative strand. By the term “dialogic,” my analysis not only refers to the thematic continuity between the two large narrative strands but also draws attention to their aesthetic similarities—particularly, with the use of the figures of artifacts as metaphors. In examining this dialogic relationship, I argue, Dung suggests that history writing does not merely pointing to the past, but also to present experience as well. In other words, the dialogic relationship between the past and the present manifests itself in the

materiality of writing as a necessary component of any historical narrative. This dialogic relationship is furthermore rested, as my analysis will suggest, on the notion of possible worlds. Altogether, such a multi-layered understanding of the importance of the artifact, the dialogic relationship between the past and the present, as well as the notion of possible worlds constitute the second meaning of historical Sinophonicity

In the very beginning, Xu Xu is shown to come to life as the narrator pens his first sentence: “When Xu Xu woke up, she found herself fully naked in bed” (15). What follows is her initial discovery of her surroundings in a tactile, physical way. When she sits up on the bed, “she reached out her hands to touch her long straight legs... [and] it was real” (ibid.). The affirmative tone at the end of the quote indicates Xu Xu’s unfamiliarity with her body and the environment. Meanwhile, the narrator has explicitly stated that Xu Xu is his literary creation in the first narrative strand. As such, the above-quoted scene can be read as a metafictional moment. As Patricia Waugh holds, metafiction builds on an opposition between “the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion... to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction” (Waugh 6). That metafiction as a narrative strategy is about the creation of fiction echoes the narrator’s intent in writing a novel about the power of creation, as mentioned in the last section. The foregrounding of Xu Xu’s fictionality is, I argue, illustrative of how the knowledge of the self, in the larger context of Hong Kong, is a product of human activity. Xu Xu’s lack of a past existence is an analogy to the current unfinished investigation of the historical formation of Hong Kong’s local identity.

Furthermore, the narrator suggests that the ongoing discussion of Hong Kong’s identity should be grounded in the lived experience of the everyday person. Near the end of the first

chapter of the second narrative strand, the narrator writes: “She saw herself smiling in the mirror. She decided right then that, no matter what the circumstances might be later on, Xu Xu must smile. That was the first decision made by Xu Xu herself” (Dung, *Works* 17). The narrator’s assertion that Xu Xu makes decisions out of her own volition diminishes the narrator’s authority in the narration. These quoted sentences can be read with a consideration of both the narrator’s and Xu Xu’s voices. The receding of the narrator’s authoritative voice sets the scene for Xu Xu’s active search of her voice in a plot development that occurs later. This echoes the narrative strategy adopted in the first narrative strand, in which the diverse voices of the everyday person are prioritized over a singular, homogeneous perception of the Hong Kong self. In this way, Xu Xu’s story is tightly linked to the current discussion of Hong Kong’s local identity, in that it refuses to allow a single discourse on selfhood to prevail.

Additionally, the notion that Xu Xu is in control of her own agency is already hinted at in the first narrative strand. In the chapter “Radio,” the narrator writes: “In order to have Ru Zhen in my life again, I exhausted all my creativity, but it is you, Xu Xu, who walked out of my imagination” (38). The use of the conjunction word “but” suggests that Xu Xu is more than a mere replica of Ru Zhen’s character. This point is substantiated in the second chapter of Xu Xu’s story. The narrator puts Xu Xu’s consciousness into words: “Xu Xu realized from the beginning that she had an unusually acute awareness of self, as if her inner self is constantly looking through a mirror at the outer self” (43). The ostensible display of Xu Xu’s awareness of self has two meanings in terms of metafiction. On the one hand, the use of metafiction shows how the knowledge of self is always created to some ideological end, as discussed above. On the other, by asserting Xu Xu’s subjectivity, the narrator simultaneously dispels the idea that one’s sense of self can be imposed upon solely to suit some ideological agenda. As de Certeau helpfully argues,

writing “conquers” and “will transform the space of the other into a field of expansion for a system of production” (de Certeau xxv). De Certeau sees colonialist writing as an act of violent imposition on the colonized people. The power of writing always resides on the side of the colonialists. Their dominant presence makes colonialist writing “the only means through which the world can be made intelligible” (Buchanan 40). In a similar vein, if Xu Xu is to be the symbol of Hong Kong’s local identity, she needs to move beyond the narrator’s imposition of Ru Zhen’s character on her.

Regarding the display of Xu Xu’s subjectivity quoted above, the tension between creating the knowledge of self and deconstructing that creation is thus an example of the tension between pursuing a unity of self and its unattainability that has been mentioned in the preface of *Works*. By virtue of this, Xu Xu’s individuality can be understood as a dynamic process of becoming. She is more than a mere product of the narrator’s imagination. Her story is the joint effort of her expression of individuality and the narrator’s narration. The tension underlying the dual voices in such a narration also resembles that of the double narrative lenses employed in the narrator’s act of tracing back to his childhood experience in the first narrative strand. Given that the two narrative strands are interwoven together in *Works*, it can be argued that Dung Kai-cheung tries to construct a mutually-informed relationship between the past and present in both a thematic and stylistic sense. Such a relationship forms the basis of the second meaning of historical Sinophonicity developed in this chapter.

Moreover, this relationship is premised on, I argue, the notion of possible worlds, which can be observed through the construction of the world where Xu Xu’s story is set. In the second chapter, when she is traveling for the first time toward her high school, Xu Xu notices some physical differences between herself and other people. As she observes, “[s]omeone was swaying

two hands made of table tennis rackets... Someone had a whistle as his mouth... Someone's head was a round-bodied glass vase" (Dung, *Works* 44). At this point, Xu Xu's subjectivity is only vaguely understood, since she has only come into being for one. As such, the narrator's voice takes precedence in this scene, in order to give readers a clear sense of what is going on. To explain the anomaly described in the quoted sentence, the narrator conveniently reveals the unique setting of his fictional world a few sentences down the line. Regarding her identity, Xu Xu recalls "the 'affirmed' sign under the category of 'Renwu Shenfen' [人物身份; Identification of Person-object] on the printed school admission slip" (45). The Chinese word *renwu*, literally meaning "person-object," is usually translated as "character" (such as in a novel) in English. The play on the meaning of the word "character" immediately affirms the fictionality of Xu Xu's world. It also reiterates the premise of Sinophonicity of which language is a key aspect. Like the textual characters in a literary work, people living in Xu Xu's world are each assigned a specific function. As we read in Xu Xu's observation quoted above, these people she describes have parts of their bodies made of material objects, hence being named person-objects. Each person's special quality depends on the function of the material object they have on their body. This merging of objects and human attributes is thus another way in which the figure of the artifacts are utilized to write about how the knowledge of self is created in the first narrative strand.

Even more so, the narrator here seems to posit that the characters' sense of identity is constricted by the objects on their bodies. He specifically makes note of this situation as the principal problem regarding the issue of identity in the world of person-objects. Huang Wanhua [黃文華] holds that "the fictionality of the world of person-objects represents Hong Kong's postmodern predicament" (W. H. Huang 24; my translation). While it is unclear what Huang means by "postmodern," the "predicament" mentioned by him, I argue, points to consumerism in

modern times. Especially with the advancement of technology, people's lives have become pre-occupied by the pursuit of newly invented things. The creation of person-objects in the second narrative strand of *Works* denotes that these inventions have taken control of people's perceptions of the world, and this includes their sense of self.

In this regard, person-objects are synonymous with characters in literature in terms of how their individuality is imposed upon by external agents. More importantly, it is the ideological assumptions underlying these inventions that lead to the creation of the person-objects. In order to highlight the constructed nature of the person-objects' identity formation, the narrator sets up a confrontation between Xu Xu's sense of authority and that of the person-objects'. As the narrator writes, "Xu Xu kept telling herself: no matter what happened, this must be a normal world. Just like she found the presence of herself after she woke up and that of the sunlight, there was no room left for suspicion" (Dung, *Works* 44). Xu Xu's deliberate act of convincing herself of the realness of her surrounding world is at odds with the previous narration of her display of subjectivity. Nevertheless, the quote, viewed in a larger frame, indirectly describes the difficulty that one encounters when resisting being instilled with the master narrative of a single, homogeneous identity in the context of contemporary Hong Kong. The person-objects can be understood as products of a normalizing system of knowledge production that impacts identity formation. How Xu Xu navigates this situation with her control of her own agency is a direct reflection of the possible ways in which we approach other issues of a similar nature in Hong Kong, namely the ongoing discussion of a local identity.

The analogy between the world of person-objects and contemporary Hong Kong has been the underlying assumption of my analysis in this section. However, the narrator's choice of an imaginative setting to discuss Hong Kong's current circumstances can seem random vis-à-vis

the realistic Hong Kong setting in the first strand. I argue that the connection between the two strands, as well as the analogy mentioned above, is established based on the notion of possible worlds. As Xu Xu's world unfolds its many aspects of living in the narration, the narrator's voice becomes less and less observable in the narrative. The metafictional form appears less, as the unnecessary insertion of the narrator's voice undermines Xu Xu's expression of self-determination. Nevertheless, the condition of the world of person-objects serves as a perfect substitute for narratorial intrusion, as it is a reminder of the fictionality or the metafictional dimension of the story. However, on rare occasions, the narrator re-appears to assert his positions:

Xu Xu did not know it, that she was after all a person-object through and through, and they were different from real humans. A real human must have a past, whether she remembered it or not, but the case was not true for a person-object. If a piece of memory or experience was never disclosed, it could be regarded as if it had never happened. This is one of the laws of being a person-object. In a similar vein, once words were spoken, a thing should be considered real. (75)

The quote describes an episode when Xu Xu is baffled by her lack of childhood memories. In this scene, the characters of the person-objects are intimately defined in relation to the act of writing compared to any other sections of this narrative strand. As their textuality becomes highlighted as their inherent characteristic, the nametag – person-object — has become interchangeable with the (textual) character.

By comparing person-objects with real humans, the narrator suggests that the boundary between these two categories is unstable. The difference between the two is underlined by the person-objects' (lack of) possession of the past. In other words, if a human is defined to be in

possession of their own past, how can we conceive of those person-objects whose pasts can be easily constructed through words? Under such circumstances, is it necessary to distinguish real humans from person-objects? As Donna Haraway rightfully contends, “what counts as human and non-human is not given by definition, but only by relation, by engagement in situated, worldly encounters, where boundaries take shape and categories sediment” (Haraway 64).

Haraway’s words remind us that there exists no a priori ontological difference between humans and person-objects. If the boundary between the two categories is established in relative terms, literary writing then provides a site where person-objects can be re-categorized as humans and vice versa. For in literary writing the past of a person-object can be drawn through words. The world of person-objects is thus not that distinguishable from that of real humans. As such, the world of person-objects can be argued to be a parallel to the world of humans, at least in the realm of literature, as it exists in the same fashion as the realistic world of the first narrative strand.

In other words, the world of person-objects is seen as one possible form of what contemporary Hong Kong would be like. Therefore, the analogy between Xu Xu’s story and contemporary Hong Kong as we know it firmly stands, particularly on the topic of local identity. The characteristics of person-objects are very similar to the predicaments of local Hong Kong residents in which they are tossed politically from one empire (Britain) to another (the PRC). As a result of this historical contingency, Hong Kong people are having so much trouble, and even controversies over their positioning of cultural identity. In this way, Xu Xu’s story of discovering what person-objecthood really entails is an adequate fit to discuss the conditions of Hong Kong society. In this way, Xu Xu’s story should not be conceived as secondary to the first narrative strand, just because the former is not as realistic as the latter. The two narrative strands are linked

by the notion of possible worlds to exemplify the idea that the ways one understands the past can lead to different interpretations of the present.

Having the above discussion in perspective is necessary to understand Xu Xu's struggles as the narration moves forward. The third chapter of the second narrative strand describes Xu Xu's experience of being bullied at school. The text explicitly states the hostile relationship between humans and person-objects. Person-objects in this context are thus seen as parallel existence to that of humans. Regarding Xu Xu, the verisimilitude of her physical attributes to a real human has led to suspicion, resulting in some classmates attempting to tear her apart to examine what she is made of. The violence of her classmates' actions is a snapshot of the animosity that person-objects hold towards real humans. The reason for such hostility is explained in the fourth chapter where the movie *Edward Scissorhands*²⁶ is showed. Although Xu Xu and other students are mainly charmed by the protagonist's tragic love story, the movie is otherwise devised as a tool for nurturing political antagonism against humans by the school's administration.

The rhetoric used to this end includes the condemnation of human nature as evil, as well as the highlighting of the marginalization of person-objects by humans. In the meantime, to accommodate their ideological leanings, the tragic love depicted in the movie is downgraded and vilified as a diversion from its political overtones. As one teacher claims, "the so-called love story was only a sanctimonious act of charity to the person-object from the human's point of view, and simultaneously displaced any show of injustice and unreason by its anti-intellectual romantic aesthetics and sentimentality, thereby diluting the subversiveness and criticality

²⁶ Dung Kai-cheung is alluding to the real-life movie here. Released in 1990, the movie starred Johnny Depp who played an artificial man named Edward. Edward had scissor blades as his hands and developed a love affair with Kim, the daughter of his foster parents. However, they never consummated their love due to Edward's condition. The movie inquiries into issues of isolation, the human/non-human dialectic, trust and self-discovery. As such, it is a perfect analogy to Xu Xu's story.

contained within” (Dung, *Works* 113). By putting the spotlight on the subversive and critical agency of the love story based on the school’s point of view, a discourse of resistance is formed whereby person-objects are placed in the favored position of the powerless.

Nonetheless, such a discourse is made at the expense of the movie’s aesthetic values. The construction of the love story in the movie is downgraded as a distraction from the political antagonism between humans and person-objects. This points to a larger phenomenon where works of art are often regarded in service of a specific political agenda, which then leads to treating literature as the socio-cultural documents of the colonized/indigenous people. This misconception itself has become a homogenizing discourse. Here, Dung is using his writing to counter this proclivity by mimicking a scholarly criticism of the movie, which is arguably a reminder that the aesthetic value of a work of art is not secondary to an a priori ideological assumption. In his telling of Xu Xu’s story to indicate the ongoing discussion of identity in contemporary Hong Kong, we as readers should investigate how the narration of that story forms its meaning, not the other way around.

In a way, the antagonistic attitude of the person-objects toward humans can be argued as an analogy to the prevailing anti-mainland sentiment in the Hong Kong society. For humans are not seen in the world of person-objects, yet they have become a reference point from which person-objects distinguish themselves. The same is true with the image of mainland China in Hong Kong. However, such an antagonistic attitude is itself a homogenizing assumption. In the text, the narrator soon suggests that giving attention to the aesthetic value of a work of art can lead to alternative insights to the predominant discourse in society. In the instance of the movie, Xu Xu and most of the students are more struck by the representation of the tragic love story in the movie. The affective rendering of transgressive love therefore can lead the viewers to see

beyond the simple dichotomy between human and non-human, and instill in people compassion instead of antagonism. It is then likely that the narration of Xu Xu's story also aims to approach the issue of Hong Kong's local identity in a positive light rather than an antagonistic one against mainland Chinese. As such, in the face of the homogenizing view of what a person-object should be like, Xu Xu ponders: "Why did she have this abnormal expectation of, and abnormal belief in herself, so much so that she felt startled and frightened in the face of such a normative rule?"

(117). Xu Xu believes that her character is not pre-determined by the body parts she possesses.

The quoted sentence describes her burgeoning sense of self, as well as her non-conforming spirit.

The contrast formed between her agential self and the inherent characteristic ascribed to her as a person-object brings to mind the notion of historical Sinophonicity that has been discussed in the analysis of the first narrative strand. This is not, however, the only thematic and stylistic connection that can be made between the two narrative strands in *Works*. The dialogic relationship between the past and the present as mentioned earlier has more aspects of meaning than this just mentioned connection. The next section will further examine the construction of the multi-layered dialogical relationship between the past and the present as an important aspect of the notion of historical Sinophonicity for which I try to argue in this chapter. This is articulated through Xu Xu's relationship with the character Xiao Dong, which will be the focus of the analysis in the next section.

2.2.2 Xu Xu and Xiao Dong— Imagination and Literary Agency

In this section, the analysis further discusses another significant aspect that forges the dialogic relationship between the two large narrative strands in *Works*—the use of imagination in constructing the knowledge of self. This is shown through Xu Xu's encounters with Xiao Dong. Xiao Dong is described to have an androgynous outer appearance. A particular characteristic of

his is that he has pens as his fingers, which suggests that Xiao Dong was designed as a person-object whose primary function is to write. It is quite likely that Xiao Dong is a substitute for the narrator in the world of person-objects. In such a case, if Xiao Dong speaks on behalf of the narrator, there is not much need for the narrator's authorial insertion in the text. It is thus more plausible and convincing to argue that the narration of Xu Xu's story is conducted in her own voice, which is evidence of her individuality. For instance, whenever Xu Xu talks to Xiao Dong, her inner monologue suggests that she is a far more colorful character than her cautious façade exhibited thus far: "Xu Xu grew mad every time the thought came up, that Xiao Dong was clearly avoiding interacting with her, for fear of how others might think of him. What a wimp! So useless! Sissy! Xu Xu cursed secretly in her mind" (73). The strong emotion expressed by Xu Xu here reveals the dynamic personality she keeps from the public eye, which is made possible through her interaction with Xiao Dong. In this way, the narrator avoids inserting his authorial voice to make a direct statement of Xu Xu's expression of individuality.

The introduction of Xiao Dong to Xu Xu's life is not merely to compensate for the narrator's unrequited feelings for Ru Zhen. More importantly, through Xiao Dong's words, the narrator reiterates the value of imagination in seeking an alternative understanding of one's selfhood. In the episode of Xu Xu's encounter with bullying at school, Xiao Dong comes to her rescue when the bullies are about to slice her open to examine if she is a person-object. Xiao Dong makes a demonstration to the bullies that Xu Xu's hair is made of a type of pasta noodle, namely angel hair. As Xiao Dong later explains to Xu Xu, "if you imagine it to be pasta, it is pasta" (82). Xiao Dong's trust in Xu Xu's ability to imagine is an act of empowerment to her. It also shows that through the act of imagining, Xu Xu attains agency over her body. Such a recognition of her own agency is important for Xu Xu, in that it suggests that the strategy for Xu

Xu to develop her sense of self vis-à-vis the homogenizing world is through her capacity to imagine alternative modalities.

This point is also indicated in the previous section where the normalizing concept of the identity of person-objects is argued to be overwhelmingly difficult to resist, which is a metaphor for the prevalent antagonism against mainland Chinese in contemporary Hong Kong. Nevertheless, if we recall the difference between humans and person-objects as uttered by the narrator, his solution to Xu Xu's dilemma has already been indicated there. The difference between humans and person-objects is said to be a myth, which is easily debunked by the practice of writing of the past. The writing of the past for person-objects is, in effect, an imaginative work. As such, understanding the power of imagination provides Xu Xu a way to break out of her existing mode of thinking, since she is confused about how the world of person-objects operates. One important proof of the power of imagination is that Xu Xu takes note of Xiao Dong's words and turns her black hair into golden angel hair. As Xu Xu's friend Not Apple sharply observes, "Xu Xu was not an android produced by the factory. She was the daughter of the imagination. She was imagination itself" (118). The capacity to imagine endows Xu Xu with agency to assert her individuality. Like Forter's notion of radical imagination in the discussion of Dong Fu's story, Xu Xu's use of her imagination reveals its potential subversive energy vis-à-vis the fixed characterization of other person-objects.

One of the culminating points in Xu Xu's use of imaginative power happens when she and Xiao Dong go on a hike to a remote village to find shell fossils. The village is depicted to be the same as the narrator's grandmother Long Jinyu's hometown in the New Territories. Long used to seek shell fossils whenever she returns to the village after marrying Dong Fu. The parallel between the two incidents is further strengthened by the linkage between Xu Xu's

capacity to imagine and Long's ability to hear radio waves in the air. As Xu Xu floods Xiao Dong with questions regarding imagination and real humans, Xiao Dong draws something interesting in her palm:

There was a shell drawing in her palm. Xiao Dong said, "it seems like we cannot find *xianrenjin* [仙人井; the god's well] today, but, if we want, we can imagine this water pool as the well, and you picked up this shell from it." Xu Xu gazed at the shell drawing in her palm, then brought it together with another one, and closed her eyes. What Xu Xu did not know, was that her posture looked like she is praying.

All of a sudden, there was a stinging pain in the wound on her right calf. The handkerchief tied around the wound was slowly spread all over with redness. It was blood. (192-3)

Xiao Dong's words to Xu Xu in the scene mirror his earlier act of entrusting imaginative agency to Xu Xu in the bullying incident. More importantly, the advent of Xu Xu's ability to bleed blurs the line that distinguishes humans from person-objects. In contrast to the narrator's previously inserted comment about the dichotomy between humans and person-objects, Xu Xu's bleeding reveals her realization of her own subjective will that can subvert the human/person-object dichotomy.

Moreover, Xu Xu's metamorphosis from being a person-object to a human also suggests the coming together of the two strands of narrative. This scene is thus a re-affirmation of the notion of possible worlds, as the connecting point of the two large narrative strands of *Works*. Specifically, Xu Xu's bleeding effectively cuts into any pre-determined line of distinction between what is real and what is imagined in a broader sense. Xu Xu's act of listening to the

shell becomes a temporal continuation of Long Jinyu's same action. The images of the remote village in both narratives consequently merge into a single continuing narrative, where the two narratives are connected as a possible past reality and one of its subsequent possible present realities. Even though one is about family history and the other is explicitly referred to as an imaginative piece, the notion of possible worlds, I contend, makes such a connection possible. In this light, the narration of the narrator's family history in the first narrative is affirmed as one of many possible varieties in the telling of the narrator's family history. What connects these two strands together then is the way in which the narrator copes with his frustrated love for Ru Zhen, which precisely means, first, to reflect on his sense of self and how this knowledge of his self has been conceived from a historical perspective. Then, the narrator applies this historical perspective as a personal ethic of conduct by which he deals with other matters in the present time, one possible manifestation of which is the creation of Xu Xu's story. As such, what Xiao Dong tells Xu Xu is, in effect, a reiteration of how one's knowledge of their self can be created alternatively through their imagination. This dialogical relationship between the past and the present premised on the notion of possible worlds thus constitutes another aspect of historical Sinophonicity, as it requires a cause-and-effect line of thinking in the writing of history of Hong Kong. In this way, historical Sinophonicity achieves the full extent of its critical capacity to subvert the master narrative of a single, homogeneous Hong Kong identity in official historical discourse.

What the narrator ultimately intends to do, I argue, is to demonstrate a wider array of insights on how one's knowledge of self can be formed. Similar to the first narrative strand, the advocacy of imagination echoes the idea of creation in my analysis of the metafictional element in Xu Xu's story. As Patricia Waugh argues again, the key characteristics of metafiction are "the

concepts of ‘interpretation’ and ‘deconstruction’” (Waugh 6). By deconstruction, metafiction “locate[s] the point of contradiction within the text, the point at which it transgresses the limits within which it is constructed, breaks free of the constraints imposed by its own realist form” (Belsey 104). Although Catherine Belsey’s explanation of deconstruction is based on a realist text, her words still attend to Waugh’s discussion of metafiction. The use of imagination overthrows the human/person-object dichotomy in Xu Xu’s story. As such, it serves as a way of deconstructing the dominant mode of knowledge production in the world of person-objects. Imagination in this sense engages us to think afresh of current situations. In the process, we may come up with new tactics in tackling practical issues.

In the case of Xu Xu, her sense of self is asserted through her bond with Xiao Dong. Their camaraderie lends her confidence to stand against the dominant ideology in the world of person-objects. Accordingly, in the episode of their hike, what we get in the end is an affective rendering of the intimate connection between Xu Xu and Xiao Dong. As Xiao Dong is carrying Xu Xu on his back to rush back to the city area, Xu Xu senses some changes in Xiao Dong’s physicality:

Xu Xu, now carried on Xiao Dong’s back, felt him much taller and stronger than usual. Was he still that short Xiao Dong who looked like a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old girl? Or was he the grown-up manly version of Xiao Dong? His shoulder became so broad and firm, his arms so strong, his legs so sturdy, his steps so steady and fast. Even his two hands, which are holding onto her legs, felt so real, no longer like those hard and long pens. (Dung, *Works* 193)

The visceral detail in the scene solidifies Xu Xu and Xiao Dong’s relationship. Like Xu Xu’s bleeding, Xiao Dong’s transformation is done through Xu Xu’s imagination. To a certain degree,

the scene resembles the diaphanous yet transcendent love between Long Jinyu and Dong Fu. Additionally, upon reading the scene, one cannot help but wonder if the imagined adult version of Xiao Dong is the narrator in the first narrative. However, I contend that the compensation theory somehow falls short, as the scene actually proceeds from Xu Xu's point of view. It is her imagination that changes Xiao Dong's external appearance, which then renders it unlikely for the narrator to have intruded upon Xu Xu's imagination at this point in the narrative.

Nevertheless, the bond between Xu Xu and Xiao Dong created in the process of imagination can be viewed as the narrator's continued intent of attaining self-redemption through writing. As the first narrative strand proceeds, the narrator reveals that Xu Xu is borne out of the narrator's past encounters with many female figures such as Xiao Ling. In those past encounters, the female figures have been the silent victims of oppression in masculinist Hong Kong society. As discussed, the world of person-objects is a microcosm of the flawed social, political and cultural conditions of contemporary Hong Kong. Xu Xu's story, conducted in a joint voice of Xu Xu's own and the narrator's, is about withstanding the corrupting force exerted on her by the outside world. Her journey, therefore, showcases the possibility of undoing the inherent deficiencies in the world of person-objects, which reflects the narrator's attitude towards the current societal issues in Hong Kong. The bond between Xu Xu and Xiao Dong suggests, I argue, the narrator's participation in standing against the problems through his creative work, as both of them are characters created by him. It is under such circumstances that Xu Xu's journey can shed light on the existing discussion of Hong Kong's local identity.

In a broad frame, Xu Xu and Xiao Dong's encounter also helps to bring closure to the narrator's feelings of love for Ru Zhen. In the analysis of the first narrative strand, Ru Zhen abandons her music dream, much to the narrator's dismay. If Xu Xu is molded out of what the

narrator remembers best in Ru Zhen, will he ever get over his strong feelings for Ru Zhen? My question arises from Xu Xu's inaction all throughout the three-quarters of the narrative regarding her realization of her self vis-à-vis the world of person-objects. Admittedly the narrator has been making consistent efforts to accentuate Xu Xu's own subjective will during this time. Other than her realization of her difference from other person-objects, she does not act subversively until the hiking episode. In most instances, radical statements come from other characters' understanding of the power of imagination while Xu Xu is only a silent observer.

For instance, Xu Xu's biology teacher, Zun Ni, at one point speaks about the relationship between humans, person-objects, and objects. He says:

Humans may have limitations in their thinking and conduct due to the material nature of their bodies, but they have self-consciousness, able to make free subjective choices. More importantly, besides self-consciousness, they have the ability to imagine... If we are no different from humans in nature, why couldn't we create our own lives with our imagination, like what humans do? (230)

Zun Ni notes the importance of imagination to human activity in the quoted passage. This point was mentioned earlier in the discussion of Xu Xu's previous interactions with other entities.

However, Xu Xu lacks, I contend, a proper channel through which she can engage with the radical potential of her imagination. In other words, Xu Xu has not found an appropriate conceptual framework from which her sense of self is developed. Xu Xu's situation can be argued to be metaphoric of the confusion that the ongoing discussion of Hong Kong's local identity experiences in terms of its theoretical positioning. Nevertheless, the confusion also denotes the possibility that alternative approaches might be thought of vis-à-vis the prevailing discourse, such as the nativist discourse in Hong Kong. Regarding Xu Xu, her active engagement

with radical imagination appears near the end of her story. It reflects the narrator's final closure of his feelings for Ru Zhen.

It is not until the tenth chapter titled "The Real World" that the narrator manages to finally bid farewell to his past feelings for Ru Zhen. Xu Xu crosses the boundary of the world of person-objects to reach the world where the narrator lives, in an effort to look for Xiao Dong who suddenly vanishes. Xu Xu's act of boundary-crossing between the world of person-objects and the human world has come about due to her use of her imaginative power. In other terms, such an act has firstly come about due to her belief in the existence of another world, which thus enables her to defy any limitations set by time and space. Moreover, the narrator's encounter with Xu Xu in this chapter indicates that Xu Xu has slipped beyond his narratorial control. What is baffling about his scene, however, is why the narrator has allowed Xu Xu to enter his world. We find that the narrator questioning himself: "She could never find Xiao Dong here. Then why did I let her come here? What was the purpose of her being here?" (368). The textual aspect of the act of Xu Xu's boundary-crossing leads to the narrator's questioning of his intentions, resulting in a battle between two thinking currents within the narrator's consciousness. One train of thought allows Xu Xu's free development of her subjectivity, as she is seen as different from Ru Zhen. This can be viewed as a symbol of Hong Kong's pursuit of a local identity that differentiates itself from that of mainland China or capitalist Euro-American societies. The other train of thought of the narrator unwittingly wishes to use Xu Xu as a replacement for the void that Ru Zhen has left in his heart. This position can be then understood as a prevailing nostalgia for Hong Kong's glorious past that has a complicated historical relation with colonialism and mainland China, yet to be resolved. In this regard, the quoted scene is illustrative of the analogy between Xu Xu's story and contemporary Hong Kong.

Throughout the chapter “The Real World,” we thus witness the narrator’s vacillation between seeing Xu Xu as Ru Zhen and his denial of that inclination. However, the former is bound to fail as the narrator realizes he has no control over Xu Xu’s behavior in his world. Xu Xu’s determination to find Xiao Dong renders any of the narrator’s attempts to change her futile. In the end, the narrator decides to persuade Xu Xu to go back to her original world. The text specifically uses the word “persuade” to indicate the narrator’s intentions: For one, to ask Xu Xu to return indicates the narrator’s final farewell to his past feelings for Ru Zhen. For another, he is now treating Xu Xu as an independently thinking individual who is capable of being persuaded. As the narrator puts it, “[w]hich possible world is real? From where I stand, the other worlds are only possibilities... Xu Xu was not Ru Zhen. Xu Xu belonged to another possible world” (372). In his realization of Xu Xu’s difference from Ru Zhen, he is also granting Xu Xu’s world its own autonomy. If what is real is relative according to the notion of possible worlds, there should not be an issue for Xu Xu to assume the realness of the world in which she resides. This is the first time in the narration where the narrator explicitly admits the world of person-objects as one possible world. What it means is that the narrator is ready to forfeit his control of Xu Xu’s world and her story with Xiao Dong, given they are characters created by him. If the narrator’s love for Ru Zhen had inspired the genesis of Xu Xu’s story, Xu Xu’s story now gradually transcends from this framework. Her story will then be seen in new symbols, befitting new changed contexts. This is articulated in the next chapter, “The Imaginary World,” where the world of person-objects turns into chaos. As uprisings in the world of person-objects against the current authority ferment even further, they become a sign of the narrator’s undoing of his control of this world. At such a point, the term *renwu* grows separate from the meaning of the term “character.” This incident then corresponds to the narrator’s reappropriation of the meaning-giving

mechanisms of the artifacts in the first narrative strand. The agential power that the person-objects attain thus attests to the power of the imagination in subverting the dominance of the master narrative of a single, homogenous identity.

As for Xu Xu's character development, Dung comes up with a more radical twist. The uprisings in the crumbling world of person-objects are led by people such as Zun Ni, who believe in their capacity to imagine alternative futures. In order to push Xu Xu to realize the power of her imagination, the narrator lets her accidentally find out that she is an invented character in a book. The consequence of her discovery is severe: "What she did not know is that, the more she read, the less real her and Xiao Dong's bodies became. What she did not know is that she and Xiao Dong could not exist simultaneously in two worlds—the world where she holds this book, and the world contained within the book" (428). The last sentence succinctly lays bare the guiding principle of the notion of possible worlds, which is about whether one believes in its realness or not. More importantly, throughout the second strand narrative, the narrator painstakingly nurtures in us an important line of thinking, that is to believe is to imagine. Therefore, in order to see Xiao Dong again before she vanishes, Xu Xu is asked to write her own story with Xiao Dong in the very last chapter entitled "The Possible World." The very last sentence goes: "[Xu Xu] used her last remaining strength. Picked up her pen. Moved it towards the notebook. Wrote down her last sentence" (463). The short, abrupt sentences suggest a disjointed flow of speech, which suggests that Xu Xu's body is steadily disappearing from the physical realm. After Xu Xu finishes the last sentence, she disappears into the story she has created for herself and Xiao Dong. As Ding Jie argues, "the possible world chosen by Xu Xu is an unpredictable one, not by 'I,' Xiao Dong or even Dung Kai-cheung" (Ding 83; my translation). Thus, Xu Xu has become the master of her own imaginative story, which is a sign of

the full realization of her individuality. Even the narrator does not wield any control of that world. This shift from the “imaginary world” to the “possible world” hence highlights the literary nature of creating a world. In the context of the text’s analogical content to contemporary Hong Kong, Dung’s narrative maneuver accentuates the concept of historical Sinophonicity as an effective means to mediate discursive discussions about the nature of Hong Kong’s Sinophone space. Put crudely, to disrupt our reified thinking of the city is essentially to start a new narrative about it.

All in all, the trajectory of Xu Xu’s life from being a replica of Ru Zhen to being the master of her own story serves as a perfect analogy for the ongoing historical inquiry of Hong Kong identity. Specifically, the creation of Xu Xu bears the burden of the narrator’s memory of Ru Zhen. Her character had been prefixed according to the rules of the world of person-objects, which effectively functions as a symbol for the unfinished project of decolonization in contemporary Hong Kong. the narrator’s world can be understood as analogous to the prevailing discourse of identity in contemporary Hong Kong, such as the nativist discourse, has its roots in the imperialistic ideology that treats China as the backward other in the Cold War period. Xu Xu’s journey to her full realization of agency is then an act of deconstruction of that dominant discourse of identity. In the process, the constructed nature of the human/person-object dichotomy is put under scrutiny. Concurrently, as Xu Xu’s story unfolds, the narrator also reflects on the question of identity formation in a macrocosmic context through the lens of writing a family history in the first narrative strand. It is in this fashion that Dung’s *Works* showcases that the dialogic relationship between the past and the present is an important part of the writing of a historical narrative.

Furthermore, the narration of the past and the present is seen through the notion of

possible worlds in *Works*. What connects the two worlds depends on the ways the narrator deals with his frustrated love for Ru Zhen. As Xu Xu creates her own possible world, the narrator's romantic feelings for Ru Zhen also come to a close in the first narrative strand. In this way, the dialogic relationship between the past and the present becomes a necessary part of the narrator's writing of history. In incorporating this relationship into his historical narrative, the imaginary nature of Xu Xu's story is deemed as one of the many possible presents. Such a position marks the narrator's historical narrative as open-ended, thus disavowing any teleological inclinations present in official histories of Hong Kong. This constitutes the second meaning of historical Sinophonicity. It is through literary fiction, in this case the metaphorical writing in *Works*, where this meaning is effectively articulated. The use of imagination in both narrative strands of *Works* ultimately showcases the vitality of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture to inspire a new critical framework that examines issues such as identity, history writing, and colonial heritage.

3. Conclusion: Writing Historical Sinophonicity and a “Natural” History of Hong Kong

This chapter has discussed how literary fiction contributes to critical studies on Hong Kong's colonial heritage through the concept of historical Sinophonicity. I argue that, as a genre, historical fiction is of great value in its ability to delineate the complex living modalities of ordinary Hong Kongers, which are often neglected by the master historical narratives. As Tamar Katz helpfully notes, “[t]he genre of historical fiction makes particularly clear the cultural desires that are articulated—narratively, thematically, metaphorically—when we imagine historical cities” (Katz 813). The cultural desires mentioned by Katz manifest themselves through the two aspects of meaning of historical Sinophonicity in *Works*. First of all, historical Sinophonicity is shown as a questioning of a singular master discourse on the formation of the Hong Kong individual self. The master discourse is, I contend, entrenched in both colonialist and nationalist

ideologies. Dung's *Works* problematizes such master discourses by writing a personalized history of tangible artifacts. This personalized history is not a coherent narrative, but is made up of disjointed family stories revolving around thirteen artifacts. Each artifact is invested with new symbolic meanings that are reflected in the telling of the subject formation of the narrator's family members. Historical Sinophonicity thus derives its meaning from the narrator's reappropriation of the meaning-giving mechanisms of the artifacts from official discourse.

The act of reappropriation is facilitated by the narrator's deployment of his imagination in the narration. The use of imagination points to the gaps in knowledge in the current historiography on Hong Kong. The novel offers a point of departure from the dominant official discourses of Hong Kong's historical narrative, in order to give way to the conception of individual subject formations through the figurative potential opened up by the thirteen artifacts. In doing so, *Works* offers a grounded observation of Hong Kong's capitalist social conditions. More importantly, the use of imagination leads to a notion of possible worlds in the novel, proposing that the past is composed of both what has happened, as well as the possibility of what might have happened. Such a concept then demands the incorporation of a dialogic relationship between the past and the present in the writing of history. This constitutes another aspect of the meaning for historical Sinophonicity in this chapter. In *Works*, the second narrative strand is created by the narrator out of his frustration over his loss of Ru Zhen in the first strand. The imaginary nature of this narrative strand proves that the link between the two narrative strands in *Works* is not the only possible route, but is one of the many possible routes that the narrator could have taken. It is based on this notion of possible worlds that the second narrative serves as an analogy for contemporary Hong Kong. Simply put, any new imagining in Hong Kong's ongoing discussion of local identity lies in, first and foremost, an act of decolonizing the mind.

To this end, this chapter sets the tone for this entire dissertation by promoting the medium of literary fiction as a major site for producing decolonizing discourses on Hong Kong. In the epilogue of *Works*, the narrator enlists the figure of (printed) books as his thirteenth object. He argues, “in order to become a good fiction writer, I needed to... transform form and techniques into a system of reflection on real life” (Dung, *Works* 478). Literary fiction such as *Works* thus delineates the particular effort on the literary writer’s part to respond to social issues in their own terms. Moreover, as He Tong-bin [何同彬] rightfully adds, “*Works* is not only a modernist experimental piece of work but also an object, product, and consumer goods” (He 42; my translation). He Tong-bin’s emphasis on the materiality of books resonates with Dung’s lament in the epilogue on the decreasing sales rate of printed books in favor of electronic ones in our contemporary world. Such a level of attention to books as material artifacts does not merely suggest the value of literature in offering alternative insight to our perception of past and present realities, but it further points to the intricate relationship between the writing of literature and the creation of city space. More precisely, I argue that *Works* establishes a new narrative aesthetic of historical fiction that highlights a parallel between the writing of literary fiction and the creation of artifacts. The parallel draws attention to the material basis of both types of creative processes. As Hong Kong’s stoutly capitalist society can be largely seen through the opulence of material things, the materiality of *Works* also concurrently marks a place-specific cultural space called Sinophone Hong Kong.

Last but not least, I wish to stress the implication of the notion of possible worlds in guiding our conception of Hong Kong’s future. Insofar as historical Sinophonicity delineates a critical inquiry into the historical conditions of Hong Kong’s local identity formation, it remains an open-ended process, as the end of Xu Xu’s story suggests. Such a view is important to

mobilize our present political, social and cultural activities. As Angelina Chin rightly remarks, recent discussions of “a local collective Hong Kong identity” are nothing more than “some fragmented memories that have no political ramifications” (Chin 1568). As a result, those “narratives... at best only articulate Hong Kong as a unique city”, thus “reinforc[ing] the city’s marginality and offer[ing] no alternative to a bleak political future” (1568). Chin’s critique underlies a sense of urgency in conceptualizing Hong Kong in ways that could lead to more progressive thoughts and actions. This sense of urgency resonates with the ethical imperative in writing historical fiction that has been discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The ethical imperative points to the idea that writing historical fiction is a response to the social conditions of a specific time. Although the ethical imperative is not necessarily a call to arms, it can be applied to inspire the public’s action from specific writings of historical fiction.

Here, I would like to return to Hui Po-keung’s book *Rewriting the History of My City* that has been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. As Hui eloquently writes in the preface, “to write stories experienced by ourselves, we also need to, at the same time, find or re-construct a social context out of which a systematic narrative surfaces” (Hui x; my translation). As *Works* constructs a family history, the narration simultaneously reflects the larger context in which Hong Kong’s historiography is embedded. While this chapter does not claim that *Works* will lead to an actual revolution, my analysis has driven toward an understanding of the novel that differs from these narratives mentioned in Chin’s statement as cited above. By writing a history of tangible things that primarily critiques capitalism, *Works* indeed offers an entry point through which critical awareness is raised regarding an individual’s relationship with these value-laden cultural symbols situated within their intimate living environments. Such an awareness is the necessary first step after which more concrete tactics and even action can follow. It attests to the

elided potentialities within the passing of history, which is precisely where the agency of *Works* is located in this chapter.

In the next chapter, the analysis continues to investigate the different ways that literary writing engages with Hong Kong's history and identity formation. Specifically, it will look into how gender identity is constructed in Hong Kong through Wong Bik-wan's *Portraits of Martyred Women* (1999) and *Children of Darkness* (2012). In *Works*, Dung Kai-cheung has briefly mentioned the issue of unequal gender relations within the masculinist context of Hong Kong through the depiction of the female characters as victims in the novel. In contrast, as a female writer, Wong Bik-wan's writings demonstrate the resilience and tenacity that Hong Kong women display vis-à-vis the oppression and discrimination that they invariably face. This point can be further put into a comparative perspective with Wong's construction of masculinity in *Children of Darkness*. The two of Wong's novels thus can be viewed in a dialogue with Dung Kai-cheung's *Works* as both writers exemplify the diverse insights literature can provide with regard to the formation of Hong Kong's local identity and historical experience.

Chapter Two: Writing the Gendered Self—Womanhood, Manhood and Lower Class Resilience in Wong Bik-wan's *Portraits of Martyred Women* and *Children of Darkness*

This chapter continues the first chapter's discussion on how literary fiction constructively contributes to decolonization of Hong Kong's culture. The first chapter has approached this matter from the perspective of historiography. This chapter further advocates a nuanced, gendered perspective into the historicity of the local subject formation in Hong Kong. Termed gendered Sinophonicity, this nuanced perspective is shown through two of Wong Bik-wan's novels, *Portraits of Martyred Women* (1999) and *Children of Darkness* (2013). It refers to the way individuals are influenced by, as well as they respond to, Hong Kong's changing historical and social conditions in forming their gendered subjectivities. In this regard, this chapter brings to attention the nexus of power within which the local gendered subject is situated between Chinese patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism. Furthermore, as a literary concept, gendered Sinophonicity also focuses on the use of language in select works, bringing up an added layer of aesthetic appeal in literature to articulate the historical specificities of gender identities in a convenient, convincing and effective way. In this way, the concept of gendered Sinophonicity proves its usefulness in offering critical insights to the decolonizing discourse of Hong Kong.

The approach to literary analysis is therefore two-tiered here. In the first place, the analysis is cast on how language is used to construct an oral history made up of diverse gendered characters' life stories. By doing so, the analysis points to how gendered *Sinophonicity* can help to articulate a differentiated sense of culture vis-à-vis other Sinitic language-speaking regions sharing the same set of cultural traditions. In the second place, by investigating processes of both female and male subject formations in the two chosen novels, my analysis showcases Hong

Kong's Sinophone space is constituted of multiple, uneven sites of power. As such, Wong's works exemplify the notion of *gendered* Sinophonicity as referring to the heterogeneous gendered subjectivities located within Hong Kong society. Together, these two layers of gendered Sinophonicity offer a much more nuanced perspective from which to examine Hong Kong's colonial heritage from the everyday life.

In what follows, I first present a brief account of the theoretical underpinning for my conception of gendered Sinophonicity, focusing in the process on its relation to the decolonization of Hong Kong. Then, I proceed to investigate how such a notion is illustrated by the construction of the female subject in *Portraits*. Specifically, the analysis touches on Wong's strategy of using Cantonese colloquialisms to write an oral history of women's lives, disavowing the Chinese patriarchal representation of women as rehearsed in official historical discourse. Lastly, this chapter concludes with an analysis of Wong's construction of masculinity in her novel *Children*. The depiction of a peripheral male subject position showcases another dimension of power relations that constitutes an important aspect of gendered Sinophonicity. Ultimately, my analysis aims to shed light on the broad gender dynamics within Hong Kong, especially operating at the intersection with class.

1. Doing Gender in Hong Kong—Tenacious Women and Resilient Men

In the introductory chapter, I have argued that gender as an analytical category is integral to understanding Sinophonicity. As literature draws experience from the everyday life, a discussion of the gender dimension often exposes neglected areas of power play among different ideals of gender conduct in official discourse. The particular framework of Sinophonicity can direct this critical energy to an articulation of a differentiated sense of Hong Kong Sinophone culture in specific terms, particularly in relation to mainland China. This is achieved through the

creative license enjoyed by literature in terms of language and form. The two novels of Wong Bik-wan's studied here serve as a sound proof of this point.

First of all, one prominent aspect of thinking of gendered Sinophonicity lies in the discussion of the female subject, as many critical discourses on gender have shown. The topic of female subjectivity is to be found in Wong Bik-wan's *Portraits*. Published in 1999, the novel is a pioneer literary text in Hong Kong because it addresses powerfully the historicity of the systematic inequality and discrimination confronting women. In the meantime, the 1990s saw feminism in the Western sphere being severely interrogated by many scholars of color for its white, middle-class-based universalism.²⁷ Although there already existed a plethora of critical works on China studies from the perspective of women's life and history from the 1970s onwards, the feminist view from which these studies were conducted is arguably Western-centric.²⁸ Notwithstanding the fact their focus is only on women in mainland China, these studies on women in general lack a great amount of nuance regarding their relationship with the family, society and state. According to Chen Chao-ju, "the double feminization of Asian women renders

²⁷ The representatives are many, and here I am only listing some principal scholars whose attention is devoted to Asian women: Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minnesota and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, ed. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Yoko Arisaka, "Asian Women: Invisibility, Locations, and Claims to Philosophy" (Naomi Zack, ed. *Women of Color in Philosophy: A Critical Reader*. New York: Blackwell, 2000); Susan Mann, ed. *Women and Gender Relations: Perspectives on Asia*, (MI, Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2004); Aihwa Ong, "Strategic Sisterhood or Sisters in Solidarity? Questions of Communitarianism and Citizenship in Asia" (*Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 4.1: 107-35); Ong, "Colonialism and Modernity: Feminist Re-Presentations of Women in Non-Western Societies" (Kum-Kum Bhavnani, ed. *Feminism and "Race."* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Tani Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1986). For a thorough investigation of gender studies in both Western and Chinese academic discourses, please see Gail Hersatter and Wang Zheng, "Chinese History: A Useful Category of Gender Analysis." *American Historical Review* 113.5 (2008): 1404-21. Also, my own understanding of a critical reading of Asian feminism mainly comes from Chen Chao-Ju, "The Difference that Differences Make: Asian Feminism and the Politics of Difference." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 13.3 (2007): 7-36.

²⁸ I am well aware of the rising discipline of women's studies in mainland China that strays away from Western feminism. However, here my primary goal is to contextualize and target at the Anglophone writing of women's studies, as the language of this dissertation is conducted in English, hence a part of Anglophone studies on women.

their agency impossible or at least an awkward exception to Asian womanhood. That is to say, the categorization of Asian women as both the non-feminist other and the authentic victim stands in opposition to the categorization of feminists” (C. J. Chen 12). Chen’s claims are premised on her understanding that Asian women are always seen as, first of all, Asian, then women by white feminists. The implication of such an approach will inevitably lead to a superior view of Western culture, as compared to the inferior, less progressive Asian cultures. It is within such a context that my analysis of gendered Sinophonicity in *Portraits* hopes to showcase how literature produced at that time challenges prevailing discursive construct on women in a city considered as a meeting place for cultures. This is achieved by the novel’s offering of a wide range of diverse lived realities in the face of patriarchal oppression, which defy the definitional bounds of white feminism.

Such an understanding of gendered Sinophonicity on women would not be complete, however, if the cultural and societal differences within Asian regions, in particular amongst all Sinitic language-speaking communities are not taken into account. Literature becomes an effective medium through its manipulation of language and form to convey these differences. In *Portraits*, Wong Bik-wan inserts Cantonese colloquialisms into her narration of lower-class women’s life, forging a network of oral histories. This use of informal, vernacular style in the written script is certainly not unique. Yet, what separates Wong’s writing from others is a clear change of the Cantonese-inflected narration, from all oral form to more of a standard written script, as the novel details three generations of women’s suffering and strife. In this way, Wong’s language articulates a temporal disposition, successfully bearing out the transformation of Hong Kong’s cultural and societal values over the years.

Ultimately, underlying Wong’s narrative choice of an oral history form is arguably her

concern with the absence of women's active voice in historical narratives. *Portraits* therefore gives voice to many underprivileged, lower class women so that they can tell their life stories in their own terms. More importantly, the narration is to show, as I argue, how class intersects with gender among the majoritarian Chinese community in Hong Kong under different historical forces in the larger scheme of the world. In this regard, *Portraits* is "not so much concerned with female identity as with female subject position, or the question of who determines the meaning of female experience" (L. Liu, "Invention" 39). The female identity that Lydia Liu refers to in her argument denotes the sex categories that distinguish *men* from *women*. Despite radical feminist theories about the falsity of such categorical bounds, in *Portraits* Wong writes through the biological term of woman to emphasize the agency embedded therein. According to Liu, the question of who writes women's stories is a more important issue. It is from this perspective that we can appreciate more how the novel delineates a spectrum of women's subject positions that not only troubles white feminism but also distinguishes itself from literary discourse on the mainland. In this way, *Portraits* demonstrates the aesthetic and critical appeal of gendered Sinophonicity in grounding the issue of gender within the historical specificities of a place.

To expand the above point further, I turn my argument to the original Chinese title of *Portraits*. The name *Lienü Tu* [烈女圖] makes a reference to the ancient classic text *Lienü Zhuan* [列女傳] published in the Western Han period. Although bearing similar names, the two texts have oppositional ideological directions. *Lienü Zhuan* was intended to establish a normalized set of codes of conduct for women at that time. By "setting up standards by which women establish themselves in the world [*lishen xingshi*; 立身行世]," the text "further promotes as well as constructs the normative ideal of virtuous women [*fude*; 婦德] rooted in Confucianism" (Yu & Lou 6; my translation). At its most basic level, *Lienü Zhuan* was written by a male scholar whose

aim was to regulate women's behaviors for the interest of national solidarity. Despite its merits and contributions²⁹, the representation of women figures in *Lienü Zhuan* is, I contend, a patriarchal mediation of female subject positions. The subsequent development of such master narratives through dynastic and arguably modern times never moved away from a patriarchal agenda. It is in this sense that Wong's stylistic effort to let women speak for themselves in *Lienü Tu* gives meaning to Hong Kong's Sinophonocity.

It would be wrong, however, to locate the significance of *Portraits* solely at such a level. The historicizing perspective foregrounded by the use of the oral form provides another aspect of nuance to the text. During dynastic times, a paradigmatic shift had occurred, marking a transition from *Lienü Zhuan* [列女傳] to *Lienü Zhuan* [烈女傳] in historical records about women. In the title of the first book, *lienü* refers to the inclusion of many types of women figures in the historical narrative. By contrast, in the second book, *lienü* denotes a specific type of woman figure, namely the chaste women. This epistemic shift results in the fact that “chaste women [zhenjie lienü; 貞潔烈女] became the main trope through which women were represented” (9; my translation). The emphasis on women's chastity connotes a tightening of normative codes of conduct on women in intellectual sphere. The notion of chaste women denotes virtuous women who would rather die than be defiled by savages. The most typical example would be a maiden lady who treasures virginity above everything else. The term also refers to widows who avow never-ending loyalty to their dead husbands. The two groups of *lienü* mentioned above—maidens and widows—are basically “two sides of the same coin for male-centrism” (Wang 330; my translation). From this consideration, Wong's reenactment of *lienü* to refer to her fiercely

²⁹ One of the work's most salient contributions lies in its pioneer endeavor to write the first history for women against the male-dominated literary tradition. As Wang Li-ying notes, “women's history has since become an important topic in the field of historical studies” (L. Y. Wang 24; my translation). Whatever ideological agenda this work is supposed to serve, it did enable the visibility and representation of women in official discourse.

resilient women characters in *Portraits* therefore poses a direct challenge to the traditional notion of chaste women. As Heidi Huang Yu succinctly puts it, *lienü* in *Portraits* “posits the living conditions of women as meager and contemptible as well as feisty and recalcitrant” (H. Y. Huang 63; my translation). The act of historicizing those *lienü* then hints at a differentiated trajectory regarding ideals of womanhood in Hong Kong vis-à-vis those on the mainland. As Tani Barlow writes, “[h]istory, more than other ways of thinking about modern women, offers the possibility of working out the particular contingencies in play at each advent of women” (Barlow, *The Question* 11). The process of working out particular contingencies is, I argue, the laying bare of the various layers of power play affecting a range of gendered subjectivities. This constructs the other meaning of gendered Sinophonicity explored in this chapter.

This alternative meaning is further expounded in another of Wong’s work *Children*. Apart from the patriarchal oppression of women, the gendered subject position of men is also contested in critical discourse. Contrary to popular belief, scholarship on manhood and masculinity in the last decade has proved that patriarchy is not an inherent feature of one’s masculinity. Daily manifestations of manhood are arguably equally subjected to discrimination and prejudices on the grounds of class, wealth, age, respectability and so forth. The conflict between different codes of masculine conduct thus provides a vantage point from which the diverse potentiality of gender is understood within the single living space of Hong Kong. Moreover, this relational view of masculinity also helps to explain the dynamic process of becoming contained in the notion of gendered Sinophonicity. To elaborate on this point, I cite Kam Louie’s dyad of *wen-wu* as my theoretical basis. First mentioned in his book *Theorising Chinese Masculinity* (2002), the *wen-wu* dyad presents a culture-specific lens to consider masculinity. Put plainly, *wen* denotes one’s cultural attainment, and by contrast, *wu* refers to

one's martial prowess. As Kam astutely notes, *wen-wu* “encompasses the dichotomy between cultural and martial accomplishments, mental and physical attainments... [I]t captures both the mental and physical composition of the ideal man” (Kam, *Asian* 14). The double emphasis on cultural and physical attainments already differs itself from the Western conception of the macho man. More importantly, the axis of *wen* and *wu* can lend insight into alternative manifestations of manhood, as Wong does so in *Children*.

In my opinion, there exists an inner power struggle within the *wen-wu* dyad. Historically speaking, *wen* has arguably taken primacy over *wu* in Chinese culture. For “the Chinese tradition of macho hero represented in terms as *yingxiong* (英雄; outstanding male) and *haohan* (好漢; good fellow), are counterbalanced by a softer, cerebral male tradition—the *caizi* (才子; the talented scholar) and the *wenren* (文人; the cultured man)” (Kam, *Theorising* 8). This privileging of *wen* values also finds resonance in contemporary times. As my analysis of *Children of Darkness* will show, the imbalanced power relation between the two types has yielded a romanticized notion of heroic villainy in Hong Kong's popular cultural production. The street gangster in cinematic productions is the most typical representative. Nevertheless, Wong's writing warns us that such an image disguises the unglamorous side of living on the margins of society. As such, both *wen* and *wu* ideals “can perform an oppressive function” (14). It is under such circumstances that Wong's unromantic, as well as gloomy, construction of a street gangster exemplifies the critical agency embedded in the notion of gendered Sinophonicity.

Last but not least, my discussion of gendered Sinophonicity has relied on an assumption of human's capacity to endure and thrive in the face of adversity. Such a resilient spirit is echoed in the Foucauldian notion of practices of the self. As Lois McNay discusses, “although practices of the self are defined by the social context, the way in which the individual is related to these

practices is by no means reducible to such a context” (McNay 61). McNay’s statement underscores the elasticity of the social space for subversive gender acts against prevailing norms. In a larger sense, either the conformity with or resistance to certain gender ideals belongs to the act of doing gender. As West and Zimmerman put forward, “to ‘do’ gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in the behavior at the risk of *gender assessment*” (West & Zimmerman 136). Doing gender thus means adopting a multifarious subject position “in which different perspectives can be brought to bear upon each other” (Mitchell & Parsons 6). And this is, I contend, precisely what Wong’s two works have demonstrated through the construction of gendered Sinophonicity.

The textual analysis that follows begins with a reading of three generations of women characters from Wong Bik-wan’s *Portraits*. First I analyze Li Waner’s story, which is given in chapter three of *Portraits*. She represents the contemporary generation wrestling with issues arising from the 1997-handover. Then I discuss how Li Waner’s struggle is given historical context through earlier struggles of women: In section 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, I discuss Song Xiang and Lin Qing as emblematic of the 1920s to 1950s generation of women. In section 2.3, I discuss three pairs of women characters who taken as a whole are emblematic of the period 1950s to 1990s. This section includes a discussion of Yin Zhi and Dai Xi who allude to homosocial and homosexual lifeways pathologised by the heteronormative mainstream culture. Finally I move on to Wong’s depiction of marginal masculinity in *Children*. By organizing my chapter like this, I give background to how Li Waner’s generation benefits from struggles of earlier generation of women. Such a way of conceiving gender in Hong Kong from a historical sense connects Wong’s writing to the decolonization of Hong Kong. In addition, the coverage of “masculinity” as a gendered construct allows us to appreciate Wong’s incorporation of the Cantonese

vernacular in writing. Such a stylistic choice substantiates the nuances of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture. Together *Portraits* and *Children of Darkness* showcase the multi-layered power dynamics within which gender is "done" in the Hong Kong context.

2. *Portraits of Martyred Women*—Womanhood, History and Lower Class Resilience

The analysis of *Portraits* in this section puts focus on how Wong's textual construction of womanhood effectively substantiates the notion of gendered *Sino*-phonicity. As discussed above, by *Sino*-phonicity, I highlight two aspects of Wong's writing. For one, Wong's writing lends women voice to tell stories in their own terms. Such a positioning of the female subject thus challenges the traditional masculinist master representation of women in Chinese cultural contexts. For another, Wong's historicizing of women across generations in oral form exemplifies an alternative subject position vis-à-vis gender consciousness in mainland China. These two aspect are interwoven into my textual analysis below.

To begin with, Wong's use of Cantonese colloquialisms to narrate an oral history of women merits greater discussion. *Portraits* consists of three chapters, entitled *wopo* [我婆; My Grandma], *womu* [我母; My Mother] and *ni* [你; You] respectively. In "charting a checkered women's oral history," Wong plays with focalization in the text (Hou 190; my translation). For instance, in the first two chapters, the narration is conducted in the second-person point of view. Although the titles of the two chapters suggest the first-person narration, the sentences therein start with "Your grandma XXX..." or "Your mother XXX..." The titles affirm a definitive female voice for the narration, on the one hand. On the other hand, the second-person perspective speaks directly to readers in an engaging manner. As such, the shuffling between the first and second-person creates a female subject position that includes all women. Concurrently, the informal syntactic structure of the narrative is illustrative of the lower class background of each

character, particularly since “the majority of the main characters are either illiterate or semi-literate” (L. Y. Liu 169; my translation). Liu’s point is vitally important, in that the use of plain vernacular arguably adds more affective weight to readers’ overall impression of the text. It is also in this use that a place-specific, differentiated sense of gendered self can find its expression.

Furthermore, there is a notable shift of style in the oral language as the narration moves along the generational line. Such a shift reflects the changing historical conditions confronting women during different times. For instance, in the third chapter “You,” the narration is conducted in the first-person point of view, contrary to the other two chapters. The use of “I” in a more literary language arguably establishes a closer connection between the female character and readers. Nevertheless, in what ways does this choice of focalization enrich the meaning of gendered Sinophonicity discussed above? This question will be the central focus of my analysis in the following part.

2.1 Third Generation of Women—Female Sexuality as Political Allegory

This part marks the beginning the textual analysis of gendered Sinophonicity, the focus of which occurs in the chapter titled “You” set in the immediate years leading up to the 1997-handover event. I argue that Wong’s assertion of a female sexual subject position serves as a political allegory for Hong Kong’s collective sense of identity against the background of the imminent handover. In this way, the construction of the female subject embodies the idea of gendered Sinophonicity. “You” is a tale of the protagonist Li Waner’s coming of age through her romantic entanglement with three men, Youyou, Dominion, and Mick. Li narrates her story in the first person in a tone that conveys far less intense emotions than that of the other two chapters in *Portraits*. The high emotional intensity found in the narration of the other two chapters is in tune with their violent content, depicting the oppression of the women characters by patriarchal

norms in Hong Kong. By contrast, the bland narrative tone is largely reflective of the broad social improvement made in women's status during the last two decades up till 1997. For example, women had gained equal opportunities for education as their legal right; women in the New Territories were allowed inheritance rights in 1994; birth rate was reported to have declined, due to late marriages and more freedom for women to choose their marriage partners. Wong Heung-wah and Yau Hoi-yan add that "[a]ttitudes towards chastity have also changed, as virginity is no longer expected and divorced women with children also find it easy to remarry" (W. H. Wong & Yau 239). These changes is subtly reflected through a bland narrative tone in Wong's writing, as the tension between patriarchal oppression and resistance takes on a less intense scale. Especially by setting the end of the narrative time in the year of the handover, Wong demonstrates that women are active participants in conventional history.

However, such a calming tone is simultaneously contaminated by a sense of ambivalence. The opening sentence already captures such a sentiment: "Every day many people depart from this world, and every day many people come into this world. As for me, I'm just drifting about in life, without really knowing anything" (Wong, *Portraits* 240). The free direct speech seems to speak to a general audience, describing a prevalent mentality in Hong Kong on the cusp of political change. The combination of a bland tone and a purposeless mindset consequently yields an ambivalent point of view towards the social reality. Nevertheless, this ambivalent perspective is soon countered by Wong's description of Li Waner's sexuality. In the broad social context, the institution of nuclear family arguably remains the basic social structure in 1990s Hong Kong. The power relations between women and men are still defined by "the prevalence of traditional gender norms and [reified] patterns of spousal interaction in families in Hong Kong" (Choi & Ting 176). Such regulation means that any public discussion of female sexuality is heavily

stigmatized or taboo. As such, Wong's blunt description of female sexuality in the text poses a direct challenge to the masculinist representation of women. Even more so, we are presented with a rare situation in which a woman is romantically involved with three men at the same time. Wong's deliberate arrangement thus attests to the idea that expression of female sexuality can potentially "[affect] hierarchy, patterns of domination, and the distribution of resources" (A. Wong 266). This is achieved not only by accentuating a female voice, but also by reverting the power dynamic whereby the decisive power is in the hands of Li Waner.

To tie Li's alternative romantic lifestyle closely in with my conception of gendered Sinophonicity, I cite Tani Barlow's theorization of *nüxing* [女性] in official discourse in mainland China. Introduced into the Chinese context during the Republican era, the term regained its currency in post-socialist China. Literally meaning woman, *nüxing* acknowledges the "psychology of gender difference [neglected in Maoist times]," providing "a position of great potential for resistance" (Barlow, "Theorizing Woman" 278). Accordingly to Barlow, *nüxing* obtains its meaning on the basis of the male/female sexual difference, which was previously ignored in the Maoist regime. The term therefore pays attention to the differentiated lived experience between the male and female sex. In this regard, Wong's notion of *lienü* bears the same political overtone. However, despite the subjection to the sex categories, *lienü* differs from *nüxing* in the sense that "Post-Mao *nüxing*... has rendered itself powerless in the face of clearly prejudicial 'scientific' claims to female inferiority" (ibid.). *Lienü*, as represented by Li Waner here, connotes a reversal of the power structure that deems *nüxing* inferior. In this respect, *lienü* serves as a useful metaphor for a differentiated sense of Hong Kong's Sinophone space. Against the background of Hong Kong's political transition, Li Waner's story thus becomes a suitable political allegory for the assertion of a local subject position vis-à-vis mainland China.

To substantiate this point, Li's romantic relationship with three guys needs further scrutiny. At one point in the text, Li notes: "freedom means, being able to decide my own life; never growing old... at four o'clock in the morning, if I feel lonely, someone would come to my apartment, and switch the lights on for me" (Wong, *Portraits* 241). Viewed from her label-defying romance life, Li takes the ideal of individual freedom beyond normative orders. Traversing on sexual promiscuity, Li narrates her story nevertheless in a matter-of-factly tone. Stylistically, the writing attempts to legitimate Li's behavior as an accurate embodiment of her individual will. Such a writing style, in turn, brings forth a sense of moral ambiguity regarding women's romantic life in contemporary urban Hong Kong. As discussed earlier, traditional gender norms still prevail in personal conducts in Hong Kong. Monogamy, as a key feature of heteronormative values, is widely accepted by the public, possibly including readers of this novel. As such, Wong Bik-wan's depiction of Li's relationship status is likely to elicit an unsettling reaction from readers. The intention, I argue, is not only to put on display the diverse living conditions of women, but also to showcase their sometimes unnerving interrelationship with one other.

However, the narration also showcases Li's anxiety regarding whom to pick as her final settlement. Such an end will definitely diminish, and even compromise the value of her previous label-defying lifestyle. However, by writing out this tension, Wong arguably demonstrates the extent to which Li's pursuit of individual freedom is confined by the broad social value system. In the actual writing, this point is illustrated through an emphasis on Li's bodily experience. The female body therefore acts as a contested space where different gender ideologies wrestle for domination. To expound my argument, I cite three depictions of Li's candid bodily reaction to her sexual intercourse with respectively Youyou, Dominion and Mick:

“Youyou liked to start with legs, then moving gradually up while my feet gripped in his hands. It was so comfortable, to be in his grips.

...

My skin would always remember Dominion’s weight and pressure. Even in embrace, I could still feel his weight, like a boxer.

...

Mick... grabbed my hands when he entered me. As if we were together going somewhere dark and unknown, carefully he held my hands, and very slowly entered me.” (242-3)

In the first place, the provocative depiction above can be viewed as Wong’s response to any external criticism of Li’s promiscuity. The privileging of corporeal pleasure goes against the popular conception of love whereby emotional connection is heavily featured. Love in this regard is understood as the heteronormative ideal of monogamous romantic relationship. By boldly speaking out on the often silenced topic of women’s sexual pleasure, Wong’s writing ventures into new definitions of womanhood. Nevertheless, such a venture is bound to have obstacles along the way. Insofar as each of the three men has affected her emotionally and psychologically at different times of her life, we are told that Li is unable to decide to whom she can claim love. This reluctance to claim love is, I contend, influenced by her interaction with other gendered subjectivities, in particular Youyou and Dominion.

Li, You and Dominion—we are told—were originally college roommates and close friends. Their friendship is best evidenced by the fact that they would sleep in one bed and nothing would happen. When this level of intimacy escalates into a physical one, the balance between them is said to be toppled. Both You and Dominion realize that they cannot be with Li

without damaging their friendship with each other. It might be a stretch to say that Li's dilemma with You and Dominion is a manifestation of the possessive masculinity rehearsed in hegemonic notions of romantic love. Nonetheless, it is safe to argue that Li's dilemma represents the dominance of the monogamous ideals of romantic relationship. As Li ponders, "why d[oes] one have to belong with another person? I thought You You and Dominion were different from other people. I never thought we belonged with each other" (272). Li's refusal of normative categorization for their relationships is met with the gradual silent retreat of both men from her life. This conflict between her radical womanhood and normative values is again shown through her bodily pain: "I began to have headaches all day long, couldn't sleep, and eat. My body became thinner and thinner, and dark circles around my eyes grew more and more" (262). In moments like this, Li's resilient spirit is made overt in writing. Although she is swayed into thinking that she needs to settle with one man in the name of love, she is reluctant to make judgments based on external standards. This aspect is articulated through her relationship with Mick.

If Li's radical womanhood is largely stigmatized, she is unwilling to ignore her bodily experience in her pursuit of monogamous love. It is easy then to understand why she chooses to let go of Mick, who is depicted as an ideal candidate for a caring and loving boyfriend:

"I was already in pain, his every move made it worse. I said nothing, and endured. I endured, the sweetness and pain of sex. When entered, I felt pain; when he stayed inside, it got better. He moved, pain again. As the sex became more intense, it got better again.

To love, or not to love, it was so inexplicable.

I could not.

Mick was great, if I fell for him, I would definitely have it, his unencumbered love. But I couldn't." (282)

It would be wrong to assume from my discussion above that Li only focuses on her bodily pleasure. Li's dilemma with You and Dominion is a testament to her concern with emotional connection within a love relationship. It is the neglect of bodily experience on women's end in public perception of love that arguably spurs Wong's writing of Li's radical aspect of womanhood. Especially under the contemporary socio-cultural conditions, women are said to enjoy as much individual freedom as men. It is therefore sometimes very difficult to discern the problematic buried beneath the surface of the discourse of gender equality. Mick's unconditional love and concern for Li to some extent embodies the ideal type of male-female love relationship in society. Women are often depicted as the happy recipient of the love given by such a figure. Li's reaction to Mick's love based on her sexuality (both physical and emotional desires) therefore foregrounds in a rather forcible fashion the equal importance of women's own subjective will.

The conflict arising from Li's relationship with the three men elevates the tension between an ambivalent outlook of life and her attempt to adopt an assertive female subject position. Taking into consideration that the novel was published in the immediate years after Hong Kong's handover, such assertiveness arguably describes well Hong Kong's struggle to maintain a sense of local identity vis-à-vis the larger political shift. In this regard, the text illustrates how literary language and form can help articulate the complex experience of the local residents during this specific historical moment.

What eventually solidifies Li's exemplary function of gendered Sinophonicity is her relationship with her mother. Near the latter half of the chapter, the text tells us that Li's mother

is a remarried housewife who is on bad terms with Li Waner. A full-time housewife in 1990s Hong Kong, Li's mother, we are told, is often bullied and beaten by her Eurasian husband. The lack of economic means for independence in life results in her blaming her daughter for her misfortunes. She keeps saying, "if it weren't for you" (251) to her daughter. Li's usual reply, "you are useless" (ibid.), is followed by her decision to move out of her mother's house when she enters college. Here, what we find in the dispute between Li and her mother is two discourses of womanhood produced under different social and cultural conditions. The family violence that Li's mother endured resembles that encountered by many women in the second chapter of *Portraits*. As my later analysis will show, the Chinese familialism in Hong Kong to which many of the "mom" generation are subjected reigns over any expression of individualities. By contrast, Li herself is raised in the neo-liberal ideology of individualism in which expression of selfhood is of the utmost importance. However, I would like to stress that these two discourses are not exactly oppositional. Admittedly, the story of Li's mother reveals her vulnerability to male-centric violence and discrimination. At the end of the third chapter, she seems to reach a balance with her husband Singler whereby they live their life separately within one household. As Li comments, "it was after all a satisfactory marriage" (268). Li's mother finds her own way of dealing with her suffering in the end.

As for Li herself, the fact that she is able to make free choice for her life is predicated on the material wellbeing provided by her family. Additionally, as the text keeps suggesting, it is from her mother that Li inherits the resilient spirit against adverse times. Surely, the resilience in Li is expressed more in the form of strong-mindedness. There nonetheless is a sense of continuity between the second and the third generations of women in the novel. For Li, despite the material security, there are different sorts of factors contributing to the precarious state in her

life, as evidenced in the above analysis. The key, then, is whether she can recognize the power relations operating under the surface of her relatively freer life, like her mother's generation. Li says at the end of her story: "The moment I began to understand the difficulty of being an adult, I became a grownup, a mature woman" (267). In other words, growing up means to have a critical awareness of the socio-cultural conditions under which one is situated. At the same time, one learns to negotiate the terms whereby she lives her own life through constant interaction with other gendered subjectivities. In this sense, Li's decision to move back to her mother's house after graduation is indicative of her renewed appreciation of her mother's struggle and striving in life. She is able to empathize with her mother's dilemma, as well as ready to make an effort to reconcile their disputes.

Li's reconciliation with her mother arguably requires an act of historical retrieval on her part. This acting of tracing back, coupled with the specific political context within which this novel was written, can be construed as a symbolic act of re-investigation of the historical formation of Hong Kong's socio-cultural system. By doing so, the political allegory of Li's story for the 1997-handover is fully established through the construction of her gendered Sinophonicity. More importantly, the gendered implication of Li's story also reaches beyond the timeline of the handover. In the next part, the analysis focuses on Wong's construction of gendered Sinophonicity by earlier generations of women. The ways these women navigate adversities in life, I contend, will bring the concept of gendered Sinophonicity to bear on our contemplation of gender in future times.

2.2 First Generation of Women—Extended Family, Extended Sisterhood

The analysis of this part focuses on the construction of gendered Sinophonicity of two women, Song Xiang and Lin Qing, who grew up during the pre-war years of Hong Kong. My

argument is placed at two aspects: first of all, Wong's literary representation puts women at the position of the breadwinner in a household, despite the lower social status given to them at large. Furthermore, by highlighting women's agency, Wong replaces the hierarchical relationship between the first wife and concubines with a unity of sisterhood. In doing so, the text showcases how two fiercely tough-minded women weather austere living situations typical of their generation. The alliance of sisterhood forged by them then, I contend, lends insight into contemporary women's movement in Hong Kong.

By going back to an earlier time, Wong's portrayal first exposes the prevalence of traditional Chinese values on gender conduct. Such prevalence is arguably a result of the problematic, disorderly colonial governance in 1920s Hong Kong, as discussed in my introductory chapter. Consequently, the local community were leading "their own way of life and... look[ing] after their own needs" (Leung 22). Compared to other colonized regions, such a situation seems to give a positive description of colonialism in Hong Kong. However, the social reality was more complicated in that the internal conflict and hierarchy between different classes were neglected in the narrative quoted above. Even more so, the cooptation of the local gentry by the colonial government only secured the interests of the rich. To a large extent it ignored many underprivileged people living on the margins of culture and society. Regarding women's status, the cooptation leads to "the prolonged maintenance of patriarchal social institutions in the name of respecting the social customs and practices of Chinese society" (E. Lee 4). As such, women are arguably expected to live by the traditional codes of conduct exemplified by the chaste women [*zhenjie lienü*; 貞潔烈女] discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Another salient manifestation of the patriarchal tradition is the institution of extended family. As Liu Liangya writes poignantly, women "are enslaved tools to their extended family,

their body and labor completely in the service of the family, without a tint of personal freedom or leisure” (L. Y. Liu 174; my translation). In the text, we see Lin Qing in particular falling victim to the operating logic of her extended family. Nevertheless, when the power of the patriarch is stripped away, both Song and Lin show how the extended family can transform into a strong union of sisterhood.

2.2.1 The Tale of Song Xiang

Bearing the above discussion in mind, my analysis in this section puts focus on Song Xiang, whose gendered Sinophonicity is embodied in a survivor’s desire. Such a desire is tightly linked to her means of labor. Compared to Li Waner, Song’s lower class background is overtly felt through Wong’s use of simple Cantonese vernacular. She is depicted as a child vendor selling cigarettes on one of the main streets of Kowloon, Jordan Road, in order to make her big family’s ends meet. Her living environment is characterized by a lack of order, infested with visible, unlawful acts of crimes. At one point, Song, we are told, witnesses a pickpocketing crime conducted by some coolies. When they tell her to look away, her reaction is equally ferocious: “I kept staring at them” (Wong, *Portraits* 8). Here, Wong Bik-wan first of all introduces the overall bleak social environment of Hong Kong before and during the Second World War. The segregation between Chinese and Euro-American communities arguably serves as a major contributing factor for such an environment. This is then coupled with the fact that many lower class Chinese were refugees from mainland China who were trying to escape the political turmoil there in the 1920s and 1930s. Song Xiang’s family is depicted as coming from such a background. These people had little access to resources controlled by the business or ruling class people in Hong Kong. Consequently, their life is surrounded by a sense of precarity and instability, to the point of destitution: “There was nothing left to eat; a bloody trail was formed

on Jordan Street, both sides of which were piled with dead bodies” (11). Within Song’s family, her siblings and cousins are constantly given away to other families due to their shortage of resources. Subsequently, her knowledge of self is informed under such precarious conditions.

Song’s desire to survive a harsh environment, I argue, articulates a recalcitrant spirit that fits Wong’s definition of *lienü*. For instance, when Japanese soldiers occupy the city, Song decides to work for their operations: “Even with a knife held against her head [by the Japanese soldiers], your grandma had no choice. Your grandma had to work as a bricklayer. With nothing to eat, there was no other way” (8-9). Wong’s depiction of Song’s thought process is presented in a neat talking manner. Partially it is reflective of Song’s illiterate background. Partially it is illustrative of a sobering awareness of her living environment. In a way, doing labor for Japanese soldiers awakens Song to the importance of her individual safety and wellbeing. Instead of merely contributing to the sustenance of her family, she is also working for her personal survival.

Song’s gendered subjectivity is also expressed in the story through her budding sense of romance. By narrating Song’s romance, Wong also engages in a discussion of the relationship between women and nation. From the 1920s to 1940s, Chinese people experienced a surge of nationalism with regards to invasions by foreign powers. Hong Kong’s geopolitical position made it one of the most politically active centers for Chinese nationalism. In this light, the liberation of women is to a large extent linked to their role in nation-building. Conflicting pressures were enacted and imbricated. On the one hand, women were set free from the shackles of the traditional Confucian codes, as evidenced in the New Culture Movement. They were encouraged to get an education and to participate in political activities. On the other hand, their individual subjectivities were often drowned in or overshadowed by the overarching nationalistic cause. As Kwok-kan Tan correctly notes, “both the traditional Confucian discourse and the

revolutionary discourse of the 1930s have discouraged the construction of a self-identity” (Tan xv). By writing Song’s budding romance with a Japanese soldier Ding Guagua, Wong Bik-wan in my opinion undercuts this nationalistic representation of women. In this way, Song’s gendered Sinophonicity is made present in the narrative.

The act of writing against the nationalistic narrative is smoothed over by Wong’s depiction of innocent love between Song and Ding. An untypical soldier, Ding is shown to have a kind heart and a caring attitude towards Song and her co-workers. As a result, Song is touched by his acts: “If the war went on forever, wouldn’t it mean that I could come here every day, and he could see me every day” (Wong, *Portraits* 66). The rare occurrence of Song’s soft side under her survivor spirit underlines a humanist concern for individual feelings. Song’s womanhood is not lost vis-à-vis national conflicts. However, it would be wrong to say that Wong’s writing condones the inexcusable crimes committed by many Japanese war soldiers. For one thing, Song’s feelings for Ding are not reciprocated, as we are told that he soon leaves Hong Kong for Java to participate in more battles. For another, the exception of Ding’s solicitude is accompanied by the discrimination practiced by the other soldiers because of her looks. Song never suffers any sexual assault by Japanese soldiers, contrary to what we commonly read in literature about comfort women. The text later reveals the reason behind this phenomenon: “It was only until later that she found out it was because she looked so ugly. Thank goodness she looked so ugly” (9). The exertion of violence on female bodies during the war is present in Wong’s writing. In a different light, such writing also foregrounds Wong’s humanist concern for women’s individuality amidst major political events.

Song’s experience of being subjected to a male gaze is more acutely felt in her marriage to Ah Yue. In the first place, we find no evidence of interaction between Song and Ah Yue prior

to the proposal. Her marriage is decided by her parents, much like women's situation in ancient Chinese dynasties. Women thus are evaluated based on their exchange values. As Wong Jinghui [王靜慧] insightfully contends, "the act of 'exchange' marks a one-directional colonization on women" (J. H. Wong 9; my translation). Put plainly, women's bodies are considered disposable goods in their extended families. They are supposed to be the passive receivers of what is chosen for them by the paternal figures in the family. Song is no exception to this prevailing value system, as she wonders: "was he really going to treat her well? It seemed endless, this journey of life, how should we fare?" (Wong, *Portraits* 59). The simple construction of sentences arguably conveys Song's confusion and worry more directly and affectively to readers. Her set of questions introduces specificity to being a woman in Hong Kong of her generation. The lack of free choice forces them to accept whatever is thrown at them. As the text shows, Song's marriage into another extended family propels her to confront unfair power relations at a level that is not unfamiliar to her. Even more so, it proves that her survivor's spirit is the result of a learning process that stems from all the struggles and striving encountered in life.

Such a new level of unfair power relations is most acutely felt by Song after she becomes paralyzed upon giving birth to her daughter. Within the same year as her paralysis, we are told that Ah Yue marries another woman Lin Qing, taking her as his concubine, without asking Song. Afterwards, Ah Yue would only have sex with Song for the sake of conceiving a son. In her relationship with her husband, Song is thus reduced to being a reproductive function and nothing else. The unjust treatment leads to Song's fierce resistance, including a public brawl with the concubine Lin Qing. The brawl between Song and Lin implies, we may argue, that Song has not yet located the root of her predicament in the overall social system. Nevertheless, the action does show Song's fierce character, one that developed from her experience as a street vendor. As the

narrative proceeds, the constant absence of Ah Yue in Song's life gradually allows her to develop an independent and self-sufficient way of life. In other words, the absence of Ah Yue forces Song to acquire her economic independence. Her affordance of basic subsistence in turns adds to her tough survivor's character.

Wong Bik-wan is careful not to construct an all-too-positive figure that might derail from the historical reality of many women. The text subsequently presents us with Song's negative reaction towards her unfair treatment. For instance, Song's bitterness towards her husband's lack of responsibility leads to her maltreatment of her son: "Your grandmother Song Xiang wanted her son to be dead" (71). Another example would be Song's tearful reaction to Ah Yue's internment by the police for his involvement with local gangsters: "Your grandmother was shocked to tears, not knowing how long Ah Yue would be interned" (97). Song's bitterness towards Ah Yue and her son reveal with her emotional side, one that is only shown previously through her feelings for Ding Guagua. This soft side, moreover, prevents Song from wallowing in endless bitterness and cynicism. Hence we find Song blaming herself for abusing her son: "her son was so small, only two years old, but she was locking him outside cold, nearly freezing him to death" (71). The writing on motherhood here gives a more dynamic characterization of Song.

In contrast, Song's attitude towards Ah Yue is shown to grow increasingly unforgiving as the narration moves forward. At another point in the text, Song says to Ah Yue: "if I die first, you're good. Otherwise if you die first, I'll do nothing about your dead body" (94). At the actual funeral site of Ah Yue's, Song keeps her words by simply "sitting there like a guest, wearing plain clothes, not observing any rituals" (111). Song's vehemence here reminds us of Eileen Chang's portrait of *yuannü* [怨女; the rogue woman]³⁰. The notion of *yuannü* is popularized by

³⁰ There are some essays working on the comparison between Eileen Chang's *yuannü* and Wong Bik-wan's *lienü*. Wong has publicly denounced any resemblance of her characters to Chang's. Yet, in some of her short stories, such

the success of Chang's fictions such as *The Rogue of the North*. The trope is often used to stereotype women in China who have suffered great injustice in life. These women in the end either become cold-hearted matrons with deep-seated cynicism, or as Chen Yashu [陳雅書] observes, "wallow in self-pity and self-defeat, slowly getting old" (Y. S. Chen 177; my translation). In this regard, the rogue woman is not at all subversive of patriarchal norms. In effect, they mark the insidious effect that such norms have on women. The antipathy of the rogue woman arguably connotes a silent acceptance their powerless status. Disguised under the mask of cynicism, they hold an unsympathetic view of other women's plight. In more severe cases, these matrons even assist individuals who commit violent acts against other women, helping as such to sustain the rule of patriarchy. Accordingly, Song's unforgiving attitude towards her husband should be differentiated from these archetypical rogue women characters portrayed in Chang's novels. The most overt difference, I would say, lies in Song's changed attitude towards Ah Yue's concubine of Lin Qing. As she notes herself, "I hated my husband, not his concubine" (Wong, *Portraits* 114). Despite her past brawl with Lin, Song is able to think beyond the usual petty relationship between the first wife and concubines. In this regard, her hostility towards Ah Yue may be said to embody Wong Bik-wan's condemnation of patriarchal norms in Hong Kong.

Perhaps the ultimate criticism of patriarchy on Song's part is her decision to send Ah Yue money and other living necessities when he is interned in prison. Such a decision is accompanied by Song telling the police not to let Ah Yue's concubine visit him, and by doing so becoming the only person upon whom Ah Yue can depend during his prison time. With Ah Yue is stripped of

as "Moon of Twin Cities" [雙城月], critics such as Huang Nianxin have found intertextual evidence with Chang's fiction *The Golden Cangue* [金鎖記] in plot settings and characters' names. Wong Nim-yan [黃念欣] argues that Wong attempts to subvert the image of the rouge woman through a "violation of text" (N. Y. Wong 231) whereby the characterizations in Wong's story are polar opposite of Chang's. It is not my intent to expand on the comparison between Wong and Chang. My purpose is to point out here Wong's creative impulse to subvert the traditional image of submissive, meek, and self-pitying women.

any economic means, Song's money-earning ability puts her in the position of the breadwinner in her household. Based on her attitude towards Ah Yue, her behavior should be viewed as an act of moral integrity on her end to provide for family members. Like the depictions of her budding romance and motherhood, this show of responsibility adds more dimensions to her tough survivor's character, and hence her gendered Sinophonicity. In the next section, the analysis will move to another woman character with a similar survivor's character, Lin Qing. In tracing the construction of Lin's gendered Sinophonicity, however, we observe a different yet equally complex network of power relations at play. This allows readers to obtain a more layered perspective regarding Hong Kong's living space.

2.2.2 The Tale of Lin Qing

My analysis of Lin Qing's portrayal continues to focus on how her subject position is shaped by the trope of labor. In contrast to Song, Lin's labor serves as a regulating mechanism of her conduct as a woman. Lin's gendered Sinophonicity is then manifested in Wong's arrangement of a differentiated approach with regards to the question of how she copes with hardships, eventually leading her to forge an alliance with Song Xiang. Growing up in a remote village in the New Territories in the 1930s, Lin showcases the injustice and violence imposed on women by male villagers. She was raped at a young age by her own uncle and then sold to another village as a *tongyangxi* [童養媳].³¹ The act of selling female descendants for monetary gains is arguably very common in rural areas. As Gail Hershatter helpfully notes, "a petty capitalist mode of production centered on family businesses [has] led to regionally variable marriage forms in which families sought to maximize the returns on young women's labor and in some cases to commoditize women outright" (Hershatter 997). Hershatter's argument points out

³¹ Literally meaning "kid bride", the term refers to a teenage girl who is betrothed at a small age to another family's son, and, in accordance with traditional customs, has to live with that family from that time onwards till she is formally married into the household.

the centrality of the family to which women are subjected. Like other capitalist production, women are exploited agents whose activity is in service of the wellbeing of the patrilineal family. Regarding Lin's case in the text, we are told that she is one of many female victims of her uncle's sexual assault in the village. When such vicious deeds are exposed, however, the only punishment for him is that he needs to treat the whole village to a big meal; he has to slaughter thirteen pigs for the occasion. The meal therefore becomes an occasion for the promotion of homosociality while the real victims are cast aside. As the text puts it: "After pork was eaten, and the pigs' testicles brought home [as a side dish] for drinking, the police couldn't enter Sha Tau Wai (the name of the village) anymore" (Wong, *Portraits* 17). Taken from an enlarged perspective, the lack of any external judicial intervention in such matters showcase the cooptation of Chinese rural elites by the non-interventionist colonial government. The Chinese patriarchal order is thus kept intact and perpetuated through such cooptation.

The prevalence of the patriarchal order is presently felt by Lin Qing as manifested in the way it regulates her conduct. This can be observed in her daily labor routine after she is sold to another family. Marie-Paule Ha comments that a woman's gender identity is "defined... in terms of her relation to the family kinship system as mother, daughter, wife" (Ha 427). Lin Qing acquires her knowledge of self precisely through a set of obligations cast on her as *tongyangxi*:

At four in the morning [she] poured wastewater into the fodder, fed the pigs and shoulder-poled rice wine to Kowloon for sale. At 5 am [she] reached Kowloon and walked back to Fei Ngor Shan at 12 pm [after selling the wine]. Heading back to the village, your grandma still carried two buckets of wastewater on her shoulders while yoking a bagful of rice at hand. (Wong, *Portraits* 29)

Notable from the depiction is the lack of Lin's own voice, completely subdued by the heavy

workload. The repetitive daily labor routine arguably renders her body an exploitable asset. Her sense of womanhood is shaped under the regiment of her labor experience. As Judith Butler astutely notes in her book *Gender Trouble*, “gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow” (Butler 191). Butler famously argues for a constructed process of one’s gender identity through “the stylization of the body” (ibid.). From this consideration, Lin’s daily labor exercise is a form of such stylization of her body. However, Wong Bik-wan does not simply settle into this single rigid manifestation for Lin’s sense of womanhood. Rather, her writing contradicts itself by presenting a disjointed narrative of the stylization of the body. By doing so, it not only corresponds to Butler’s idea of gender as an unstable category; it also suggests the possibility of Lin’s subversion alongside the changing perceptions of womanhood.

The first disruption of Lin’s status as a *tongyangxi* occurs when Lin is raped by her father-in-law. The incident takes place after Lin’s child husband died of pneumonia, and is done with the help of her two mothers-in-law. The participation of women in this horrible crime can be understood by the trope of the rogue women discussed in the earlier section. The concubine of Lin’s father-in-law’s, Li [also known as *Fantou Po* or literally “remarried woman”] is a typical example of a rogue women. We are told in the text that Li was saved by Lin’s father-in-law from her suicide attempt due to the violence she had suffered in her first marriage. Li laments her misfortune in the form of a folk song: “Aiyaah—Wooya—People have houses to live in—I don’t even own a bed—Aiyaah—I’d rather be a ghost than a human” (Wong, *Portraits* 32). Folk songs are an effective means to voice the life stories of illiterate women. As Yip Hon-ming helpfully notes, “in the rural area where patriarchal tradition persists, women tend to express their grievances by way of establishing their subculture and interpretation of folklore” (H. M. Yip

320). Singing folk songs belongs to this type of activity, as “female singers are important bearers of oral tradition and folk culture” (321). Moreover, Yip also points out another important aspect in his argument—the creative mediation embedded in such exercise by women. What folk songs are performed and passed on to next generations arguably reflects the subjective will of those female performers. In the case of Li, the fatalistic sentiment expressed in her singing is arguably reflective of her cynicism, much like that of the rogue woman. Her participation as an accomplice in the raping of Lin Qing only reinforces the idea that women are disposable, exploitable objects of the patrilineal family.

From this consideration, Wong’s writing of Lin Qing’s story in the form of oral history can be construed as a resistance against women’s internalization of patriarchal values. Furthermore, as Sara Salih contends, “although Butler asserts that gender is constrained by the power structures with which it is located, she also insists on the possibilities for proliferation and subversion from within those constraints” (Salih 50). Salih’s argument about possible subversion of gender norms is a testament to her belief in individual agency. In Lin Qing’s case, her subdued voice as a *tongyangxi* proves that her agency is a learned entity. The raping of Lin Qing has disrupted, I would say, the initial hierarchy within the household. After the incident, Lin should not be considered as a *tongyangxi*, but as a concubine to her father-in-law. This changing perception of self is accompanied by Lin’s sobering awareness of the family’s physical and mental subjugation of her. It arguably prepares her for the possibility of developing a more subversive character in the future. Under such circumstances, Wong Bik-wan continues to push for Lin’s agential development by introducing a second disruption of her status—the Second World War.

The destructive force of the war serves as an effective tool to create disruption to the

existing order in Lin's life. Consequently, family interests are placed below the individual desire for survival. We are told that due to the Japanese Occupation of the rural area, there is an acute shortage of resources and supplies of food. Driven by hunger, Lin's urge to survive brings out in her a survivor's spirit on a more intense scale than her endurance of the rape incident above. After a few accidental encounters with Japanese soldiers and a tiger, she acquires a new outlook on life. This is what she concludes: "Japanese soldiers couldn't kill me; tigers wouldn't even bite me; I'm no easy to be killed. Y'all wanted to me die; it's not going to happen now" (Wong, *Portraits* 45). Her words are an outcry against all the sufferings that she has endured. It is further an instance of her individual agency. The desire to survive feeds her mental strength and prepares her to cut off her dependency on her father-in-law's family. When her father-in-law tries to physically abuse her again, Lin fights back this time with a gun obtained from a dead Japanese soldier: "Today you'll die here. I shall revenge" (52). Eventually, Lin kills him and flees to the urban area of Kowloon.

The fact that she flees the control of her old family, however, does not suggest that she is free of patriarchal regulation. The radical action Lin Qing takes against her father-in-law is simply not applicable to the peaceful urban environment. Patriarchy within the Chinese community is never eliminated, as also evidenced in Song Xiang's story. Accordingly, the question becomes: how much of Lin's learned survivor's spirit can be of use here within an urban context? Although Lin is able to work in the city, like many other women in Hong Kong due to the thriving economic situations after the war, she is still subjected to male domination both in her workplace and private life. Because of her uneducated background, the types of jobs she takes are all menial. The writing at this point is more centered on Lin's new extended family life, most likely for the reason that Lin's struggles are more notable there. Lin's inevitable

leaning towards family life, I would argue, is more telling of the pervasiveness of family ideology in the local Chinese community. As Fanny Cheung puts it, “although Chinese social scientists have pointed out that the Chinese personality emphasizes the group or family over the self, the strong family orientation is particularly evident among Chinese women” (F. Cheung, “The Women’s Center” 103). Cheung’s argument is pertinent to the thinking and values held by many women of Lin’s generation. However, just like Salih’s argument about the proliferation of gendered subjectivity, Lin’s survivor spirit has the potential to gain her a favorable position in the family dynamics. This can be gradually discerned from her relationship with her new husband Ah Yue.

Compared to Lin’s father-in-law and her uncle, Lin seems to enjoy equal status in her relationship with Ah Yue. The care and love he expresses towards her convinces her to marry him, despite her knowledge that he has a first wife, Song Xiang. Lin’s agreement to the marriage has, I argue, more implications than being a mere expression of love. On the one hand, by saying yes, Lin subjects herself to the heterosexist hierarchical relations inherent to the contract of marriage. She will legitimately become Ah Yue’s concubine. As a result, she is liable to the bias and antagonism usually lashed at concubines. On the other hand, we can still detect Lin’s sense of agency articulated through her request to have a proper wedding ceremony in the same fashion as a wife would have. Lin tells Ah Yue that “you have to marry me properly” (Wong, *Portraits* 74). As Rubie Watson helpfully observes, “a concubine...was positively enjoined from traveling to her new household via the red sedan chair, which only the *qi* (the first wife) could use” (Watson 179). Coupled with her experience with her previous family, Lin’s insistence on a proper wedding ceremony hence could be construed as her determination to assert herself as Ah Yue’s equal partner. Lin’s intention attests to her capacity to perform a subversive form of

gendered subjectivity despite the constraints of Chinese family ideology.

To add one more example here, on the night of their wedding, Ah Yue finds out that Lin is not a virgin. The unabashed and firm tone in Lin response demonstrates how she is taking control of her own body: “From now on, you are not to return to that smoker wife of yours...Pulling her hair, [Ah Yue said] you had slept with somebody else. Ah Qing turned around, looking strikingly beautiful, [said] get off of me. The man paused for a short while, then went deep inside her” (Wong, *Portraits* 76). Lin’s body at this point is no more a site of sexual exploitation by men, but an embodiment of her own subject.

The tension between being a concubine and aspiring to be equal informs much of Lin’s life afterwards. At times it is quite infuriating and depressing for her to the point that she lashes out at her mother in the fashion of a rogue woman: “Mother, why didn’t you just kill yourself...Maybe I should have killed you, it’s all because you sold uncle [so he took his revenge on me]” (89). Nevertheless, Lin’s perception of her womanhood differs on a large scale from that in the pre-war years. For instance, during Ah Yue’s internment, Lin finds another lover and is even impregnated by him. The man turns out to be a human trafficker and soon leaves Lin. In a sense, Lin’s struggles all come from her dependence on men, from her desperate need for love and affection. It is only until after Ah Yue has long gone that the survivor’s spirit in Lin is pushed to its peak, allowing her to recognize the importance of self-love and self-value. By this point, she has also forged a strong connection with Song Xiang. The feud between the first wife and concubine at last transforms into mutual respect and support. At one point in the text, when Song is hospitalized, Lin goes to see her. They are talking about Lin’s refusal to live with a rich elderly doctor, who is considered as the guarantee of Lin’s wellbeing in her old ages:

I am not as nimble as before now; can’t really do any work; I don’t think I can go

to do dishwashing; I break plates every day, though my manager never utters a word. Why are you still working, Qing; go live and look after the old doctor; pretend that's your payment... your two grandmas, one seventy, another sixty odd years of age, giggling together. (108)

The whole paragraph is structured as an interweaving dialogue between Lin and Song, in the form of free direct speech. It is difficult at times to discern who is speaking the sentence. The interweaving structure is therefore the textual embodiment of their union of sisterhood. This is, I argue, deliberately done by Wong to showcase a shared sense of struggle and striving as women, regardless of their past disputes. It is precisely in instances like this that gendered Sinophonicity attains a vivid illustration in how language and form can delineate cultural particularities of a place. More importantly, such shared experience eventually evolves into validation of independent selfhood and womanhood. Lin recognizes that she no longer needs to depend on a man to live well in her extended family as well as in this world. To this end, the trajectory of her subject position is able to articulate a differentiated sense of gendered sensitivity.

All in all, the gendered Sinophonicity exemplified by Song Xiang and Lin Qing may be said to challenge the traditional image of chaste women. Their stories suggest possible ways in which women resist the negative effect of patriarchal norms on their subject formation. Apart from the rise of a vernacular female voice, their independent means of labor helps to loosen up the patriarchal hold of power in the family. Nevertheless, what if women's labor is a necessary component of the patriarchal power in the family? In Lin's case, her escape from the rural area to the urban environment marks a shift of power dynamics in her life. What is lacking in Wong's narration, though, is that such a shift possibly succumbs women to another site of power of the same masculinist nature. What if the relationship between women's labor and the patriarchal

family is inscribed in official discourse? These questions are the central concerns of my analysis in the next section.

2.3 Second Generation of Women—Working Daughters and Perpetual Gender Battles

The analysis in this part focuses on working women living under the industrialization of Hong Kong from the 1950s through the 1990s. The lens of gendered Sinophonicity then helps to articulate how Wong's construction of female subject position questions the image of working women depicted in official discourse. In the first place, social recognition of women's contribution to Hong Kong's modern economy increased during this period. Accompanying such recognition is women's greater access to social and economic capital than Song and Lin's generation. For example, they had educational opportunities, though many attended only at the elementary level. Concurrently, as Susanne Choi and K. F. Ting helpfully note, "wage employment did indeed provide women with the resources to negotiate for more personal freedom in leisure and the choice of intimate partners" (Choi & Ting 160). However, my analysis also underlines the extent to which these women are still confined by the family ideology in Hong Kong. Such a confinement can be observed in the term "working daughters."

In *Working Daughters of Hong Kong*, Janet Salaff characterizes the family system to which working daughters are subjected in the industrialized Hong Kong as centripetal. As she astutely notes, "Hong Kong society takes a factional form and the Chinese family maintains a centripetal regime" (Salaff 9). Salaff argues that industrialization in Hong Kong has strengthened the centrality of the nuclear family over individual will (including those working daughters). Eliza Lee further explains that "the modified centripetal family evolve[s] from the traditional Chinese family to emerge in industrializing Hong Kong under conditions of low wages and the lack of social welfare" (E. Lee 7). Lee first points out an economic pragmatism behind the birth

of the nuclear/centripetal family. The advent of working daughters then means more contribution to the overall financial income of the family. In this sense, Lee's argument highlights the intersecting forces of class and gender onto women's subject formation in a family. If we recall Lin Qing's case, her labor is deemed the family's property because of her sex. Here, similarly, both lower-class poverty and the residual Chinese patriarchal norms are regulating mechanism of women's behaviors.

To distinguish the historical particularities between working daughters and the previous generation, I cite Tani Barlow's theorization of *funü* [婦女] to illustrate my point here. *Funü* was used as a propagandist tool in official discourse under Maoist regime in mainland China. Especially during the Cultural Revolution, the term subdued any nuances in female experiences by absorbing women and men into a collective whole in service of the nation. According to Barlow, *funü* "allowed for the social production of woman in politics but disallowed any psychology of gender difference" (Barlow, "Theorizing Woman" 278). The emphasis on women's political economic status in the term *funü* coincides the criticism made by Salaff in her study of working daughters. Regardless of the different political situations between Hong Kong and mainland China, *funü* as a discursive construct perfectly captures the dominant masculinist view on working women. It is against such a norm that Wong's depiction of six women characters here, each with different personalities, embodies the notion of gendered Sinophonicity.

Specifically, the female subject position of the six *lienü* is articulated through a tension between the subjugation of Chinese familialism and personal aspiration towards individual integrity. By integrity, I refer to the personal ethics whereby these women live their lives as independently thinking agents. In other words, while women are expected to prioritize family interests over the personal, there are many possible ways to tread different paths under the

totalizing patriarchal norms. The question is: how can women utilize their relatively limited resources to make their life accountable to themselves? This is an urgent matter, particularly for “women’s increased labor force participation may have a regressive effect if it imposes an additional burden on top of women’s domestic load” (F. Cheung, “Introduction” 6). The six women under discussion here all strive to bring personal meaning to their life as a woman in Hong Kong. Some of them act in a more submissive, or passive manner (Cai Feng and Yu Gui). Some possess an outright feisty personality (Jin Hao and Chun Lian). Some subtly challenge the institution of heterosexual marriage (Yin Zhi and Dai Xi). Accordingly, I will group the six women into three sections to further illustrate the varying ways women aspire to live a meaningful life for themselves.

2.3.1 Cai Feng and Yu Gui— A Silent Pilgrimage to Selfhood

The analysis begins with two characters, Cai Feng and Yu Gui, who are depicted as the less outspoken and assertive characters in the novel. Intimidated by the misfortunes or injustice cast on them in life, the two react by retreating to their inner worlds. It is quite difficult, therefore, to find moments when their sense of selfhood is strongly felt in the text. Nevertheless, as the end of their stories discloses, their withdrawn life is viewed by them as a conscious choice, a display of active agency. As such, their gendered Sinophonicity is embodied in a duality of submission and resilience, demonstrating that silence can also work as a source of power in asserting one’s own self.

Wong Bik-wan smartly begins Cai Feng’s story by deconstructing a prevailing myth of women’s natural subservience. Rather, she views that meekness and silence can be a tactic one actively deploys to protect one’s sense of self from external corrosive force. In Cai Feng’s case, her silence begins with her aunt’s death. Cai Feng’s aunt is around the same age as Lin Qing.

Like Lin, she is also a victim of domestic violence. Unlike Lin, however, she does not survive her husband's physical abuse. We are told that Cai Feng and her aunt share a strong and intimate connection with each other: "it was a starving time when the Japanese soldiers came, later on following my aunt's suit I had something to eat, I had bread, and I had sweet potatoes" (Wong, *Portraits* 118). The intimacy then adds more intensity to the episode where Cai witnesses her aunt's falling down the stairs of the apartment building. Still bearing visible traces of physical abuse on her body, her aunt's body remains there till her husband drags her down the rest of the stairs by her hair: "bang, bang, [her body was] leaving a bloody dotted line" (119). The scene serves as a sobering reminder of the brutal reality of women's status in a family. It has a direct bearing on the way Cai Feng conducts herself later in life, both at the workplace and at home. Her silence becomes her way of avoiding conflicts with someone who is stronger and powerful. It effectively protects herself from experiencing unnecessary feelings of defeat and subjugation.

Cai's silence arising from her witnessing of the abovementioned tragedy can be infuriating when she is placed in a setting where she is under the gazes of her male colleagues. When Cai Feng tries to get a job in Kader, a manufacturing company with higher pay and benefit in the 1960s, she is subjected to a series of regulatory gazes. The questions asked by the interviewers are concerned with her age, look, height and other physical attributes, which are considered requirements for the job. I should note that there is a big difference between practical concerns for one's physiology and the objectification of female body. Here, the capitalist logic applies to the question whether one's physical traits are qualified for a manufacturing job. Nevertheless, patriarchal norms still prevail under such settings. Cai Feng's womanhood is therefore subjected to discrimination arising from two intersecting forces. For example, when she works at a watch factory, she suffers sexual harassment from her male colleagues. However,

“your mother Cai Feng never utter[s] a word, but only ask[s] Chan’s daughter... to introduce another place to her; she want[s] to transfer” (144). Compared to the other characters discussed previously, it is easy to conclude that Cai Feng does not possess a streak of subversive spirit. This muteness perforates every aspect of her life, even in her marital relationship with her husband.

Nonetheless, Cai Feng’s reticence as a self-protection mechanism can, I argue, take on an assertive dimension. This is evidenced through her romantic experiences with two men. Her first romantic encounter with her co-worker Ah Xiong is characterized by their mute interactions. Although no words are uttered, we are struck by their sexually charged presence whenever their eyes meet. The moment is penned down in the novel in a rather erotic manner despite the workplace: “Melting glass in Da Guang Glass Factory in North Point, the place steamily hot, Ah Xiong sweated profusely and so did Cai Feng. [Then] their eyes met, the sweat drops, like small cold hands, fondly caressing their breasts all the way down their bodies” (165). Here we are presented with a rare instance of Cai Feng’s sexual awakening to male bodies. It adds more shades to Cai Feng’s mute disposition. If Cai’s story so far has impressed us with her silent subscription to male domination, Cai Feng’s gaze then gives away her first active exploration into questions surrounding her body, desire and love. Moreover, the fact that Ah Xiong never speaks a word to her, I would contend, to a large extent conditions Cai’s perception of their relationship. Ah Xiong’s lack of discursive dominance over her places the two of them on equal footings. This allows Cai to develop her own views on this matter. When Ah Xiong starts to follow her on her way home, we observe that Cai assents to his act in her usual silent manner: “That summer, the only summer your mother Cai Feng remembered, Ah Xiong, burly, glistening with sweats all over his body, followed her” (165). This show of individual will brings a positive

note to Cai's characterization.

Compared to her relationship with Ah Xiong, Cai Feng's marriage with her husband Ah Jiu involves more practical considerations, as reflected in their daily interactions: "There was nothing to say really, going to work, getting off work, looking after children; except for on the matters of money, we, husband and wife, had our own respective ways of living. Nothing was worth saying; life would be over before you knew it" (186). There is a notable change in Cai Feng's attitude towards her view on marriage and life in general, compared to her relationship with Ah Xiong. I think this stems from her years of experience of being a wife, mother and working-class woman. If previously Cai Feng's selected muteness is deployed as a defense mechanism against possible male-biased injustice, her statement at this point connotes a biting remark on the nature of womanhood. In this seemingly apathetic yet affirmative tone, Cai challenges us to re-think our normative perceptions of what it means to be a woman in Hong Kong. Cai's shrewd and insightful view on her life is precisely the source of her power to stand straight as an independent individual. If we are to dissect what fuels her powerful stance, I think the answer lies in the process of how she comes to a deep appreciation of human life and the self. This process is enacted as a lifelong journey. At times she founders and submits to feelings of vulnerability in the face of injustice. For instance, when her husband dies, she spends all her savings on Ah Jiu's funeral. Faced with the prospect of a precarious life with two children to feed, she "burst[s] into tears at the thought of it" (192). Yet, as she later shows to us, her inner strength helps her to power through precarious moments like this one.

At the same time, as Cai Feng's story shows, it is also vitally important to keep one's integrity intact. At the age of forty, Cai Feng is still living on her own terms: "Your mother Cai Feng, wordless, forty years of age, walking back from a movie alone, looked like a teenager...

Your mother's adolescence, came thirty year late" (205). Here I would like to point out that Cai's freedom to live like a free-spirited teenager is also conditioned by the resources offered in the city space. The development of the urban space, as well as the advancement of modern technologies, enable people of all age to participate in the same activities, such as seeing a movie. Especially the kind of movies that Cai enjoys belongs to an older time, which is often hard to come by. The city space of Hong Kong aptly provides such an arena for her to reminisce about earlier times. As such, Cai Feng's quietude to the outside criticism is her source of strength upon which to sustain her individuality. On her deathbed, her tranquil mind dominates the narrative tone: "Everyone dies, sooner or later; don't be overjoyed if you are alive; don't be devastated if you are dying" (228). The last sentence that caps off her life is extremely touching: "In silence, in intimate gentleness, your mother Cai Feng was gone" (ibid.). I think one of the strengths of *Portraits* is Wong's deliberate effort to write a character who lives in such a seemingly unbecoming way. The rendering of such a silent spirit in the end achieves equal, if not more, affective power in provoking readers to ponder the diverse lifeway modalities available to women in Hong Kong.

In a similar fashion, Yu Gui presents the power of living a quiet life by excluding herself from interaction with the outside world. Yu Gui is the only person in the novel that is not addressed as "your mother" to readers. Yu Gui is never married throughout her life. Even though she chooses to stay unmarried, it would be inaccurate to characterize her decision as subversive of prevailing gender norms. In actuality, the decision is induced by a far more complicated process of fearing and insisting, spanning over her entire life. Yu Gui first presents herself as a pretty impressionable girl at the beginning of her narrative. Due to her father's disability, she goes out to the streets to sell embroideries at the age of five. Her experience with the buyers and

pedestrians, mostly foreign sailors and local male workers, leads her to the conclusion that she wants to become a dancing girl in the future. More absurdly, she claims that “I am a dancing girl when there is no war; I am a prostitute when there is one” (124). This is met with her mother’s severe reproach. Every time Yu Gui’s mother hears her say that, she would “slap Yu Gui in the face so hard that she [feels] dizzy” (123). Yu Gui’s statement is in part reflective of the social reality confronting certain lower-class women in the immediate post-war years in Hong Kong. Underlying this phenomenon is the deeply entrenched patriarchal bias that treats female beauty as exploitable commodities for men. In this regard, Yu Gui’s mother’s violent recourse to face-slapping is intended to warn Yu away from moral degradation.

But the incident nevertheless establishes her parents’ power of dominance over her. This is most notable later when she starts to work in factories. When her brother tells on her to her parents about her boyfriend Ah Hua, Yu Gui is quite scared:

Yu Gui’s father didn’t say anything, your aunt Yu Gui, suddenly knelt down with a bang.

Her mother, standing behind her father, said, you don’t know anything about that guy. Maybe he is just fooling around with you. You are only thirteen, so stop seeing him.

Afterwards, whenever she saw Ah Hua, your aunt Yu Gui, would only shake her head, wordless.

Until the age of eighteen... Yu Gui’s mother would tell her, don’t you ever sleep with someone. Otherwise, you’ll be considered cheap forever, always retaining a bad reputation. (140-1)

Here we can note the extent to which Yu Gui’s attitude towards her parents is informed by her

earlier experience. It is clearly one sprung from the feeling of intimidation, as the tactic of admonition is transformed into a shaming mechanism. In a way, her parents' good intention to keep her away from possible harm by men is embedded in the discourse of female chastity. The emphasis on virginal purity is subsequently internalized by Yun as the guiding ethics upon which she conducts herself. It is at once a protective shell as well as a constraining force. On the one hand, the knowledge lends her a deep appreciation of her own body. Understanding how precious her body is counters her previous perception of viewing herself as an entertaining commodity for men. On the other hand, the fixation on pureness confines and subjugates her to the patriarchal norms, which could then have a more damaging effect on her life. This again echoes Wong Jinghui's point about women's exchange values. Only in this case, women's exchange value [female chastity] is enacted through the idea of filial piety. Just as the act of exchange signifies the colonization of women, "filial piety, by virtue of its one-directionality, transmutes into relations of dominate-subordinate" (J. H. Wong 9; my translation). Put plainly, losing virginity for Yu Gui would be a violation of her parents' teaching, and by extension the gender ideology in which she is deeply embedded. As such, it is nearly impossible for Yu to go against her parent's words. When she nevertheless forsakes their warning, Yu Gui receives a heavy blow. This is shown through her relationship with Lian Haitang.

Put succinctly, Yu Gui's encounter with Lian fits what we may call the "play-and-ditch" narrative. The story goes like this: Yu is first seduced by Lian, the handsome young man from a wealthy family; after Lian gets her body, he breaks their promises and eventually ditches her. Initially, Yu Gui's trysts with Lian open her to a world of material affluence: "He'd got money. Your aunt Yu Gui, for the first time ever, found out what a wonderful thing it was to be rich" (Wong, *Portraits* 151). In exchange, Yu loses her virginity to Lian. It would be unfair, though, to

characterize their relationship as punctuated only by material exchange. For Yu Gui the relationship also leads to a sexual awakening. Admittedly, the novel gives a rather ambivalent description of how Yu actually feels. But on the day when Yu is about to lose her virginity, Yu wears the pink bra she had put aside for her wedding night: “Lian still mentioned nothing about engagement or wedding, your aunt Yu Gui, like being possessed by a ghost, wore that pink bra” (153). It would not be wrong to infer there is an element of anticipation on Yu’s end. Considering how she is brought up in an environment that emphasizes female chastity, her decision, it can be argued, amounts to an agential display of desire, of her wish to be intimate with Lian.

This faint display of emotion nonetheless is soon overwhelmed by Yu’s feelings of confusion, guilt and apprehension. After they had sex for the first time, this is how Yu reacts:

Without virginity, your aunt Yu Gui, in the Room 902 in Hong Kong Hotel, felt a bit dizzy while putting on those high heels...

Without virginity, the hallway in the hotel becomes was incredibly long, unbelievably dim.

Without virginity, from the 9th floor to the ground, down with the lift, it took forever. (167)

The sudden burst of emotions and chaos that Yu is thrown into tellingly reveals the extent to which the discourse of female chastity is ingrained on her consciousness. Although it might be debated that losing virginity can be overwhelming for any woman, it is Yu’s action to stay single for good afterwards that more convincingly affirms the ideological implications of such a patriarchal norm on women.

It is perhaps too easy and ready a conclusion for us to draw, with regard to Yu Gui’s way

of life, that she is a victim of patriarchal norms regarding female purity. However, I think such a generalizing description elides aspects of her own subjectivity. For instance, when her father becomes full-body paralyzed, Yu stays at home to look after her father for over ten years. Yu's deliberate self-isolation from outside human contact can be attributed partly to the shame of losing her virginity before marriage. As she poignantly remarks, "those [factory workers] are still maiden girls. A dirty woman like me, if I go near them, they will catch my bad luck" (183). Nonetheless, a far more significant reason for Yu's self-confinement, I contend, stems from her active adherence to the notion of filial piety. Apart from Wong Jinghui's argument stated above, filial piety can also be predicated on the idea of reciprocity. As Stevi Jackson helpfully notes, underlining "Hong Kong parents' investing in their daughters" is "an expectation of reciprocity, a product of ideals of filial piety" (Jackson 677). The emphasis on reciprocity thus denotes, instead of one-directionality, a two-way effort. In other words, Yu Gui arguably takes on a positive understanding of the indoctrination of female chastity by her parents.

In the meantime, I want to stress that reciprocity only comes at an older and more mature age in Yu Gui's life. It is precisely Yu Gui's decision to look after her father that makes reciprocity possible. The responsibility she assumes to take care of her sick father and younger school-age brother in a way compels her retreat to domesticity. Admittedly, this behavior can be again seen as an effect of Chinese familial values and ideology impacting women in Hong Kong. Women's selfhood is subsumed by or absorbed into the wellbeing of the paternalistic family. But if we closely inspect Yu Gui's psychological makeup, we may still find a trace of self-motivation in the narrative, one that provides a progressive reading of her actions. One example would be that whenever Yu's father whines that he'd rather die than lie in bed, Yu will think otherwise of facing misery in life: "Dying is easy, while living is much more difficult" (Wong, *Portraits* 202).

Underlining her observation is, in my opinion, a display of her inner strength, stemming from not only the practical estimation of her circumstance, but also her appreciation and value of human life. Instead of wallowing in self-pity, she takes on an active and engaging attitude towards her domestic role: “Remembering the tiny gesture of kindness from her father [when she was little], your aunt Yu Gui, enclosed by four walls, spent ten years of her life [at home]” (202). As such, filial piety in Yu’s case translates as her generous love of her family, affirming a strong sense of personal integrity.

Compared to Cai Feng’s inwardness, Yu’s isolation, I think, teaches her to turn a positive look on the bleakest aspects in life. The fact that she remains working, albeit sporadically, helps to retain her sense of self at home. The individual agency shown here informs much of the rest of her life story. Especially when Yu starts to work again after her father passed away, she becomes vulnerable to changing socio-economic conditions. Hong Kong in the 1980s entered a phase of economic restructuring whereby industrial plants were moved northward to the mainland while the local economy turned service-oriented. Under such circumstances, working-class women were among the most impacted demographics. Employment becomes unstable for them, due to their lack of educational qualifications in the ever more competitive market. In the face of such precarious situations, Yu Gui never loses hope on her irregular unemployment. She always aspires for a better tomorrow. At the very end of her story, Yu even ponders on her love affair with Lian Haitang, adopting in the process a changed, and rather self-assured manner:

Your aunt Yu Gui, in her delicate and sensitive mind, nonetheless never blamed Lian Haitang, it was out of her own will and no one could force her, if she could go back in time, she would do the same thing over again, even though it meant a lifetime of loneliness... it was better than an useless husband, she never only

wanted a man, or marriage, your mother Yu Gui, long time had gone by, she thought she'd be patient, and live until a really old age, all for the reason that she was once, in her life, in love. (225)

The affirmation, and confidence that spring out of her resilience and courage becomes an antidote to her insecurity in precarious situations. I want to add one more point to this argument. The changing social and cultural context brings forth a more liberal idea on women's relation with marriage. Yu Gui is able to draw courage from her single life, most likely because she does not feel stigmatized any more. Her insistence on isolation is deployed as a source of self-aggrandizement. At the same time, Yu's reflection on her relationship with Lian makes a huge contrast from the previous description in the narrative, when she had called herself "dirty." I would argue that this change is the author's way of showing the uniqueness of Yu Gui's character. By deliberately subverting the "play-and-ditch" narrative, Yu Gui becomes the decision maker to lose her virginity to the man she loves. The duality of precarious life conditions and Yu Gui's positivity accurately sums up her experience. It is hard to pin down this experience with simple adjectives. But I believe Yu Gui has made her life accountable to herself under the existing social conditions of Hong Kong.

2.3.2 Jin Hao and Chun Lian—Women Warriors and Enduring Fight

In reading the life stories of Jin Hao and Chun Lian, we are struck by their feisty personalities, by the way they echo Song Xiang. This fierce spirit against patriarchal oppression is perhaps most befitting of Wong's category of *lienü*. Nevertheless, the category *lienü* does not in my opinion replace the category gendered Sinophonicity. It is more important to examine the specificity and nuances of a range of perceptions of womanhood operating under different historical conditions. Like Lin Qing, both Jin Hao and Chuan Lian have suffered domestic

violence at different points of their life. However, like Song Xiang, they strike a balance in life as they age, and this is partly due to their economic independence. Different from Cai Feng's and Yu Gui's, their means of labor becomes for Jin and Chun an effective way to assert their selfhood. Even under precarious living conditions, working lends them power to stand against hardships in life.

Even as a kid, we are told that Jin Hao possesses a strong and tough character. This is partly driven by her responsibility as the eldest daughter in the family. Part of the refugee flock from the Chinese mainland after the war, Jin's family lives a vagrant life. In order to survive, Jin and her father go to the streets to sell fruit illegally. When the police arrest her, she replies resoundingly: "We are just begging. We are beggars" (127). Jin's fearless spirit stems from a living situation where survival is of the utmost importance. In this respect, Jin Hao reminds us of Lin Qing. What's different about Jin Hao's case nonetheless is that Jin's drive is directed towards her whole family's survival. Family is not at all the shackle out of which she needs to break, in order to attain her individual freedom. It is rather constitutive of Jin's resistant character. Her toughness, in turn, is very effective on people such that "even the police inspector [i]s afraid of her" (127). When Jin starts to work in factories, her toughness translates into a strong work ethic. Her good performance at work is paid back with a high salary, which yields a more independent mind. When Jin criticizes her father for his addictive gambling habits, her father immediately flips out: "Without saying anything, the dinner table was flipped [by her father]. Mom, let's go and eat outside. I'll buy for you char siu bao" (130). This is one aspect of Jin Hao's character that is differentiated from both Song and Lin. Her financial independence allows her to assert herself in the midst of the patriarchal household.

It should be noted that Jin Hao does not always have the upper hand in dealing with her

father. When she starts to get close to one guy Ah Jian, her neighbors find out and notify her father. After Jin's father beats her mercilessly, she quits seeing Ah Jian. Here significantly, Jin's friendship with Ah Jian is met with both her neighbors and father's surveillance. If we conceive this policing as an act of patriarchal regulation, then what underlies such behavior can be interpreted as an obsession with female chastity. Same as with Yu Gui, Jin Hao's virginal reputation casts a constraint on her pursuit of happiness. Unlike Yu Gui, Jin Hao shows a more recalcitrant character. As she says, "alright, [if] I got beaten for seeing Ah Jian, I'll date a dumb guy then" (143). This dialectic of being recalcitrant and subjecting to patriarchal policing is eventually played out in her married life. When Jin eventually marries Ah Jian, she is not willing to sleep with him. Jin's reluctance marks her awareness of her own sexual desires, as we are told that Ah Jian is never considered a lover by her. For an honest and candid person like Jin, marriage with someone undesirable immediately portends future unhappiness. What's worse, like Lin Qing, the whole family helps Ah Jian to rape her in order to have a grandchild. This reenactment of domestic sexual violence is arguably Wong's vehement condemnation of the deeply rooted Chinese family ideology in Hong Kong. Women's powerless status conditions them to value only their reproductive function.

Nevertheless, Jin Hao differs from Lin Qing because we get to hear Jin's views about the incident. As Jin repeatedly puts it, "being a woman is so cheap" (180). In this regard, factory work then becomes her saving grace. Working in factories allows her to gain economic capital. Her capacity for making money earns her a powerful stance in her family. We are thus again reminded of Song Xiang and of her relationship with Ah Yue. Similar to Song Xiang, Jin is brave enough to ask her husband to stay away from her: "After a while, your mother Jin Hao pushed away Ah Jian, saying, why don't you find a prostitute, go to sleep with her, and leave me

alone” (181). Jin Hao’s insistence, I think, connotes her newly gained respect for herself and her body. As the main breadwinner of the family, she refuses to make any compromise regarding the self.

Jin’s integrity is also reflected in her friendship with another man, Brother Chen. Jin Hao’s encounter with brother Chen is a reminder of her awakening sexuality, which has long been suppressed in her marriage. Brother Chen is a firefighter whom Jin meets while playing *majiang* [麻將]. Although sexually attracted to him, Jin refrains from starting an affair with Chen: “Being able to touch hands on the *majiang* table was good enough for me. That almost counted as sleeping with him” (195). Jin’s story with Chen thus poses an interesting ethical question to readers. Is it morally right for Jin to give in to her sexual desire and sleep with Chen? Perhaps this is a problematic way of looking into Jin’s circumstance. For what is considered “morally correct” here is premised on our normative knowledge of monogamy operating via the institution of marriage. More importantly, Jin’s story provokes readers to contemplate the imbalanced power relations between husbands and wives. Especially given Jin’s history with her husband, I am certain any action she takes with Brother Chen would gain understanding and empathy from readers. Consequently, her decision to not advance further her feelings for Chen mocks the male characters in the novel. Jin Hao’s action showcases her personal integrity as a member of the monogamous marriage pact.

Furthermore, as the narrative proceeds, Jin’s inner strength translates into an indomitable energy to persist in the face of challenges. For instance, when she is about forty-four, the garment factory where she works closes and “with a check, your mother Jin Hao’s life appear[s] to be over” (201). Nevertheless, Jin’s recalcitrance leads her to survive and even thrive under the most unlikely circumstances. Hong Kong in the 1980s underwent economic restructuring

whereby lower class working women was arguably the most affected group. Such reality thus rebukes any easy argument about industrialization's positive role in women's liberation.

Benjamin Leung contends that, "women have been over-represented in the low-status, poorly paid occupational categories and positions" (Leung 33). In a similar vein, Salaff points out that, "Hong Kong women do not have access to a ladder of increasingly better job categories" (Salaff 22). The latent problems are exposed in broad daylight as the economic restructuring proceeds. Stephen Chiu and Ching-Kwan Lee characterize women's precarious circumstances as "hidden injuries." They list altogether four kinds of hidden injuries, i.e., "the fluidity of employment, a declining living standard, severe demoralization, and a trend of involuntary retreat to domesticity" (Chiu & Lee 107). Faced with unstable unemployment, Jin Hao undertakes different occupations with determination and boldness. When she applies for a job as an office assistant at a law firm, she pretends to the interviewers that she can speak English. As Jin herself concludes after they hire her, "it's either you reign over people or let others reign over you. The former is better" (Wong, *Portraits* 216). Jin's action in a way subverts the occupational barriers set by discriminatory social policies.

Contained in her statement above is also Jin's poignant insight into the power dynamics at play in Hong Kong society. The unyielding tone is a shining proof of Jin's resilient character. By being courageous enough to claim her rights to the city, she turns around a situation that threatens the well-being of women with limited resources. Her resilience gains her access to opportunities that might be unavailable to her peers. Jin's life experience is a testament to the elasticity of women in Hong Kong. In the end, this learned resilience becomes a sustaining strength with which to navigate through the vicissitudes of life. As she says in the very last bit of her story, "because the moon is never always full" (220). What's important is to seize any

opportunity, even under extreme circumstances, and make it count in life.

Even though Wong Bik-wan only assigns a limited space to Chun Lian's story, she is arguably the angriest character in the novel. In a way, Chun's anger epitomizes the resilient spirit of the women depicted in the second chapter of *Portraits*. The description of her life begins when she is nearly fifty-five: "Your mother Chun Lian, not a care in the world, at this age, having tried everything, or at least seen or heard them, feared nothing... Your mother Chun Lian said, if she dies first, don't bury her in the same place as your father... She only wished to die a free spirit, to be left alone" (178). The world weary overtone in her words suggests a life hardened by misfortunes, deprivation and lasting pains. The sternness in her attitude towards her husband aligns her with other feisty women in the novel including Song Xiang and Jin Hao. What they all share is their resilience to never give in to the oppression wrought by the male counterparts in their life. What is different, however, in Chun's case is Chun's radical pronouncement to break free from the set gender norms institutionalized through wifely responsibilities—obeying husband's orders, rearing (grand)children and looking after the whole family. Hence we find that Chun insists on going to work instead of living off allowances her children give to her. She refuses to help raise her grandchildren, and swears to never cook again. She even threatens to kill all three of her children if she could go back in time. As she self-assuredly speaks up for herself, "I'm not crazy, I'm just doing what I feel like doing. Enough, I've been holding back my whole life, enough" (179). Chun's anger speaks volumes about her strong individuality. This surge of agency, as the narration proceeds, is understood to spring from years of injustice and physical violence enacted on Chun Lian by her husband. Nevertheless, to say it like this is an understatement. To look deeper into the nature and cause of Chun's agency, we need to look into her relationship with her husband Jian Niu.

Jian Niu is depicted as a schizophrenic alcoholic in the text. Life with Jian Niu involves constant beating and sexual assaults. As is brutally revealed in the novel, Jian Niu drinks “every single day; later he would strip off your mother Chun Lian’s clothes, whipping on her naked body. All there left to do afterwards [i]s fucking” (188). Here I want to stress that the pathological mentality of Chun Lian’s husband is emblematic of the tragedy of domestic violence wrought against women in society. In addition, Chun’s story also alerts us to the fact that there is no support system in the communities from which Chun can seek help. For instance, when Chun Lian’s mother learns about her predicament, her only reply is, “because you don’t have a freaking penis” (190). In this regard, Chun’s situation is more severe than the other main characters in the novel. Unlike Lin Qing, she has no means to physically defeat her husband. Unlike Jin Hao, having a paying job only consolidates her wifely responsibility to support the family. What Chun does is to “endure all these, to compete who will outlive whom with her husband, until your father [falls] ill; your mother thus w[ins] the battle” (189). Underlying Chun’s tolerance of her sufferings is her uncompromising desire to survive. At this point, the text circles back to Chun’s proclamation of living a life as her heart desires. Her gendered subjectivity is formed not only by her unvented anger and grudge towards her husband, but also by a profound appreciation of individual freedom and value. In this light, Chun’s stubbornness and desire to continue working at an advanced age is an exercise of her free will.

It is in the latter part of Chun’s story that the author reveals to us her rural background and her struggles to earn a living in the city. From this consideration, we are reminded of Lin Qing’s life path. Indeed Chun Lian and Lin Qing share some parallel experiences, in the sense that Chun also toils laboriously at house chores as a teenager in the rural village, such as feeding pigs and plowing fields. They are both deprived of any inheritance rights. Whereas Lin is

somewhat forced out of her village life, Chun ventures out into the city life of her own volition. When Chun's father dies, she has to move out of their house along with her mother and grandma. The blatant injustice instigates in Chun a desire to find a job in the city: "Your mother Chun Lian said, I hate those village men. I want to go to Kowloon, to work there" (212). Here we are already having a taste of Chun's feisty character. Moreover, Chun's optimism for a better life in the city points to a correlation between working and women's independence. Life in the rural areas of Hong Kong is restrictive for women's agency. City space, by contrast, potentially promises the accumulation of material wealth and consequent social mobility. The problematics of such a stance is, however, made evident by the text: "Back then walking out to Kowloon all by herself, she thought the world was infinitely big. Later [she] found out every woman was pretty much the same, getting married and having children, being groped and screwed by men. The world was devastatingly small" (199). Chun's cutting remark on the large forces at work in her life tellingly shows why Wong's depiction of these women's stories have such great affective influence on readers. The writing constantly alerts us to the pervasiveness of institutionalized patriarchy. The poignancy in Chun's voice adds more weight to her radical desire to break free from the gender norms that she has been subjected to.

The second chapter of *Portraits* ends with the portrayal of Chun's life in the village at the end of the war: "The day we had chicken, Japanese soldiers left. It's called peace" (238). This comment is deeply ironic because, for every woman in Hong Kong, their war on gender discrimination and violence has always remained either invisible, or overshadowed by the grand narrative of history. The Second World War does not end patriarchy as women still participate in battles against gender inequity on a daily basis. Chun Lian's story thus serves as a reminder of women's courage and resilience, of their desire to never give in, to persist with integrity under all

circumstances. Eventually it seems, “peace” will come.

2.3.3 Yin Zhi and Dai Xi—Lesbian Love, Political Camaraderie

The last part of the analysis in this section focuses on two unique characters, Yin Zhi and Dai Xi, who are entangled with each other in a latent homosexual relationship. Their gendered Sinophonicity is then embodied in the trajectory of their subject position as regards their mutual affection. The writing of lesbian love underscores the radical potential embedded in the notion of gendered Sinophonicity. Angela Wong adds that “lesbians fundamentally challenge the sexual inequalities that have been continuously reinforced by heterosexuality” (A. Wong 261). By replacing men in a love relationship with women, lesbians “represent the possibility for true human diversity” (262). Nevertheless, as the text shows, the subversive performance of lesbian love is met with strong opposition from the dominant heterosexual norms in society. Especially for lower class women like Yin Zhi and Dai Xi, the very notion of lesbian love arguably cannot find presence in their daily vocabulary. As such, we see in the writing that the lesbian love between them is made ambiguous. Even though Yin and Dai’s love never take their relationship beyond the latent stage in the story, I contend that their love trajectory marks Wong Bik-wan’s most radical inquiry into the nature of womanhood so far in the novel. Hence, it is worthwhile to investigate how their love fares under changing social contexts.

Both Yin Zhi and Dai Xi are first introduced in a parallel fashion in the text, but with different backgrounds. For Yin, her childhood experience resembles the other female characters in this novel, such as Jin Hao. Because of her family’s poor conditions, she has to give up her education and go out to work. Her own individual subjectivity is significantly shaped by her working life. Compared to Yin, Dai was born parentless, and therefore brought up by her two brothers. The lack of female figure and companionship in her childhood results in her blindness

to the normative gender roles set by society. The text puts it: “[She] always wore her brothers’ old clothes. It was only until she started to work in the clothing factory that she realized there were male and female clothes” (Wong, *Portraits* 133). The contrast between Yin and Dai lies precisely in their different perceptions of womanhood. This contrast later arguably develops into a huge dividing line that eventually separates the two. At the beginning of their stories, however, this contrast provides a window of opportunity for the two to forge a friendship. When Dai has her first period, Yin is asked to help her. Dai’s reaction is rather comic: “Your mother Dai Xi, parentless, brought up by her brothers, 12 years of age now, for the first time ever in her life, burst into shrieks, frightened, when someone touched her pants” (135). The incident soon consolidates the bond between them. Meanwhile, what is notable from this instance is the fact that Yin Zhi’s knowledge of the female anatomy comes from her mother. The presence of her parents certainly influences Yin’s notion of self. This is most telling in the scene where Dai confesses her love for Yin:

Dai Xi imagined herself in a movie set, saying to Yin Zhi, I love you, and I will always love you.

Your mother Yin Zhi replied with laughter: we are eventually going to marry somebody.

Dai Xi said, I’ll still love you even after I get married. Yin Zhi said, alright. Then she grabbed Dai Xi’s hand.

The two hands held tightly, swaying. Only if there were no men in the world.
(136-7)

If Dai’s fearlessness stems from her lack of knowledge of the existing heteronormative order, Yin’s hesitation precisely connotes how much she is restrained by it. This is not to say that Yin is

complicit in furthering these gender norms. By holding Dai Xi's hand, Yin Zhi symbolically challenges the set gender role and concomitant ethics that she is expected to follow, despite it being a fleeting moment. Here we observe a paradox in Yin Zhi's subjectivity. Whereas she willingly accepts Dai Xi's love confession, she still involuntarily conforms to the ideology of heterosexual marriage. This self-contradictory mentality dominates how their relationship manifests on the outside. The text states: "The two, hand in hand, went to work together, got off work together, and participated in union activities together" (137). The incident does not result in their radical announcement of their love to the world. To outsiders, they are still just best friends.

Their ambiguous "love-friend" relationship is further complicated by their participation in union movements. In my opinion, Dai Xi and Yin Zhi's fervent involvement with leftist ideology and its social praxis details Wong Bik-wan's creative ambition to make visible women's participation in Hong Kong's grand history of political struggles. It thus sets the two characters apart from other females in the novel whose subject formation mainly revolves around personal relations with their family members. Dai and Yin devote their attention to larger projects with historical significance. They participate in alternative historical narratives. For readers, Dai and Yin's lived experiences make more discernible the extent to which the social and political context of Hong Kong informs their subjectivities. Those experiences in turn call into question the master narrative of Hong Kong's history. The past is unfolded not as a linear temporal progression of facticity. As Dai and Yin's everyday life is intimately connected to those events, the text brings to light the intricate power relations embedded in those events. More specifically, Dai and Yin's experiences easily expose the problematics inherent in the political and social movements of which they are a part. In this regard, Wong's narrative poses the question: what happens when, to borrow the famous feminist statement, "the personal is

political”? In other words, when Yin and Dai’s everyday life is preoccupied with political activities, what are the gendered consequences?

In my opinion, Wong approaches this question with two different sets of ethics. This is also due to the divergence of Dai and Yin’s life trajectories. To answer the call of the leftist organizations on the mainland, Yin Zhi goes back the Guangzhou to work in the garment factory there. From 1959 to 1961—the period of the Great Chinese Famine—Yin stayed there and committed to her political cause. As the text shows, she not only endures starvation, but is also routinely indoctrinated by Chinese communist dogma championing self-sacrifice: “Studying in the morning, and self-reflection in the evening... never thinking in the interest of self, but that of others. Sacrifice the insignificant ‘I’” (155-6). While it is not my intention to find faults with communist ideology here, the shift of focus in Yin’s political subjectivity should be highlighted. Her initial drive to fight exploitation as a working-class member is now replaced by the narrative of self-sacrifice for the collective good. Individual agency is subdued by a homogenizing code of conduct that arguably solidifies the traditional gender norms of Chinese society. The outcome is Yin Zhu’s conformist subjugation to the existing patriarchal order, as evidenced by her marriage to her comrade-leader Li Cunyi at the end of their trans-regional leftist movement. In a sense, Yin Zhu’s political life is analogous to her attitude towards her relation with Dai Xi. She has the ambition to be revolutionary, yet her behavior often succumbs to existing social forces.

By contrast, when Dai Xi plans to go to Guangzhou with Yin, her brothers forbid her by tying her up in the apartment. Dai’s decision to stop attending union activities afterwards then makes a sharp contrast with Yin’s dedication. To say that Dai’s love for Yin outweighs the draw of political causes is only one conclusion. I would also argue that by not joining union activities, Dai is acknowledging defeat in her war against the heterosexist order. Compared to following

union orders, Dai's political agency is invested more in her persistent feelings for Yin Zhi. As the text shows, attending union gatherings fails to provide her any new insight or solution. As a result, we are told she goes back to her routine work life. She only goes back to the union office to make sure that Yin is safe when the 1967 leftist riots break out. For Dai Xi, the movement provides a precious chance for her to resume her past relationship with Yin. One of the tactics that the leftist organization deploys to gain popular support is to ask Dai and Yin to pretend to be a couple to solicit supporters. In order to do this, "Dai Xi again put[s] on man's clothes, shirt, black pants, hair cut short" (174). The deliberate enactment of male-female heterosexual order here astutely brings to the fore the difficulty, if not impossibility, of the legitimation of Dai and Yin's lesbian love interest. Nevertheless, the subversive agency embedded in this enactment of male-female relationship should be taken into account of the nature of their relationship.

Apart from this, Yin and Dai's experience in the riots in the meantime discloses a grave drawback of the leftist movement in Hong Kong. As the heavy workload demanded on human labor becomes unbearable, "only after a month, your mother Yin Zhi f[alls] sick, having hot and cold flashes. As for your mother Dai Xi, dark circles gr[ow] ever more striking, how do we survive this" (175). For an organization that takes as its objective workers' wellbeing, it is ironic how it exploits it Dai and Yin. The gravest moment comes when a bomb that the organization makes explodes on a young girl. The tragic event provokes Dai Xi to reconsider her participation in the movement: "your mother Dai Xi, up until now realized riots were not for fun, that riots killed people. She would've never believed it if she hadn't been there to see it" (175). This incident is a moment of political awakening for her. The fact that she witnesses the incident engenders an awareness of how misleading and injurious ideological indoctrination can be. This changed views on their political fight leads both Dai and Yin to retreat from the movement.

Following the explosion, they drift apart.

The duality of revolutionary aspiration and succumbing to social reality continues to be manifest in Yin and Dai's political involvement later in life. The 1967 incident lends them a critical insight into the contradictions and paradoxes of hegemonic nationalist ideology. For example, when Yin Zhi and Dai Xi run into each other many years later during the pro-democracy demonstration against the Beijing government in 1989, they are not surprised to hear the news that the central government resorted to armed forces: "They fired guns. It is actually not that surprising, your mother Yin Zhi commented. Nothing unexpected. Your mother Dai Xi held Yin Zhi's hand" (211). Having witnessed the previous bloodshed, Yin Zhi and Dai Xi's more matured view of the incident suggests a more levelheaded critique of the national government. In this way, Yin and Dai renew their roles as active social agents, trying to negotiate a different relationship between self and the external social forces. Such a change is, moreover, accompanied by a corresponding regression in their personal relationship. As they get married to their respective partners, their latent lesbian love interest is destined to be subsumed by their normative wifely duties to their own families. Hence we find Dai thinking that "Yin Zhi has her own family now, and a life a woman would have" (230). At another point, Yin Zhi feels guilty about the fact that she is pregnant, as if "an adulterer, Li Cunyu [Yin's husband] was the third wheel, and Dai Xi was the legitimate family" (233). Instances such as these contrast with the preceding scene where Dai Xi hold Yin Zhi's hand whenever they meet up. Their physical distance arguably makes their emotional connection more affectively present in Wong's writing.

Yin and Dai's story ends on the day of the handover of Hong Kong's sovereignty to China. As they see each other in a sea of people watching the ceremony, they turn their backs on each other: "On July 1, 1997, the TV was broadcasting: this is the end of an era, and the

beginning of a new one” (235). The time is rather allegorical, but not in the usual sense that, in my opinion, 1997 signifies the disillusionment of all democratic political dreams. Rather it predicts a new time in which a new set of questions needs to be answered. When the grand nationalistic goal and regime is achieved, what, we may ask, happens to the personal? Will an individual’s political agency simply dissolve? Or will it be more intensely felt, in particular regarding issues of gender, now that the nationalization is a reality at hand? Although Dai and Yin’s story ends on a sad note, I’d like to think it is the author’s intention to urge us to think forward about what we can do in the future, in order to make a better tomorrow for women.

All in all, the gendered Sinophonicity of the six characters entails a positioning of the female subject under the totalizing context of industrialization. In Song Xiang’s case, the writing is characterized by Wong’s deployment of simple, plain vernacular words. The writing there points to the illiteracy of the women speakers. By contrast, in the second chapter of *Portraits*, the sentences are more refined, leaning towards those of a written script, despite the oral tone. In the process, the characterization of the women articulates a duality of resilience and conformity in relation to Chinese familialism. Nevertheless, family relations should not be viewed as the only mode of knowledge production whereby gendered Sinophonicity in Hong Kong is articulated. In the next section, my analysis will shift to a discussion of masculinity in another of Wong Bik-wan’s novel *Children of Darkness*. The male protagonist Zhou Weinan was born around the same age as the six female characters mentioned above. Accordingly, the construction of Zhou’s manhood provides a useful comparison with these women characters. As my analysis will show, there exist other modes of power dynamics that shape the development of a gendered self in Hong Kong society.

3. *Children of Darkness*—Manhood, Street Gangster and Lower Class Resilience

This section furthers the inquiry into the formation of the local gendered subject by analyzing the construction of gendered Sinophonicity in Wong Bik-wan's *Children of Darkness*. I have shown in *Portraits* that the oral form is a necessary marker of the class, educational and cultural background of the mentioned women characters. As the text moves along the generational line, we notice a transition into a more literary style with the oral form. In *Children*, however, the Cantonese vernacular is used in an almost celebratory manner throughout the text. As such, this section focuses on the vernacular aspect of gendered Sinophonicity to investigate how Wong portrays the subjectivity of the male protagonist in *Children*. In doing so, Wong's literary representation of gendered Sinophonicity adds a new dimension of nuance to living in Hong Kong.

Apart from the vernacular feature of Sino-*phon*-icity, Wong's *Children* also attests to the fact that manifestations of manhood are also subjected to hegemonic gender norms. This critical angle was actually "inspired" by second-wave feminism, which yielded, as argued in *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary China*, a "growing interest in studying men's gendered position" (Song & Hird 3). The relative late emergence of men's studies is said to be largely the result of a prevailing myth that assumes a "'natural' link between masculinity and patriarchy" (ibid.). In this regard, feminist thinking on gender performativity helpfully sheds light on the possibility of diversified and changing expressions of masculinity. Nevertheless, patriarchy, as a structural oppressive force governing male-female relations, still needs to be recognized as a pervasive ingredient in many manifestations of masculinity. At the beginning of this chapter, I cited Kam Louie's notion of the *wen-wu* dyad as a useful conceptual framework to understand Chinese masculinity. In adhering to either or both of the *wen* and *wu* ideals of manhood, there are gendered consequences. As Kam astutely notes, "daily manifestations of Chinese masculinity...

ha[ve] hegemonic aspects—in the sense that men ha[ve] dominance over women and certain classes of men [are] privileged over other groups” (Louie, *Chinese* 1). Other than male-female relations, Louie here points out another key aspect of masculinity studies. His comparison between different classes of men delineates a critical angle at the inter-relationships between various masculine identities. Such an angle is necessary because it enables the lens of gender to unveil different layers of power dynamics operating within the space of Hong Kong Sinophone culture. This relational view of masculinity is subsequently, I contend, the key to dissecting the construction of manhood in Wong’s *Children*.

Children tells the life story of the protagonist Zhou Weinan who leads a vagabond and drug-addicted life on the streets of Hong Kong. A regular resident of prisons, Zhou is said to have started his “career” as a gangster member at the age of eleven. Despite the positive representation of gangsters in popular culture³², in the novel we are told that he lives on the margins of the society. Lacking stable financial incomes, he arguably dwells on the lowest social stratum, juggling between illicit business and social welfare to get by. As such, Zhou’s articulation of manhood differs from the majority population who strive to move up the social ladder through hard work. Linda McDowell, in her ethnographic study of white working-class youths in Britain who always strut through the streets when they walk in public, describes their manhood as a type of protest masculinity. Specifically, protest masculinity is “exemplified by the ‘rebel’ or the outlaw—the young man who is antischool, antiwork, despises ties, and wants his freedom to enjoy himself unconstrained by the banalities of everyday life” (McDowell 97).

Protest masculinity therefore posits a rebellious spirit against normative codes of male conduct,

³² The image of gangster members has a wide circulation in Hong Kong’s popular cultural production, especially in cinema. Typical examples would be the characters in John Woo’s gangster movies or from the series *Young and Dangerous* (1996). Just as the title of the latter film series suggests, the image of gangster members is often romanticized as a much-adored alternative masculine trope by public reception. Further elaboration of such a trope will be discussed later in the textual analysis.

according to McDowell. However, such protest masculinity can simultaneously be a destructive force in that it can lead to overcompensation “toward enhanced masculine sign vehicles” (Walker 6). In other words, the protest masculinity expressed by working-class youths, when viewed as an attempt to justify their manliness, likely ends up reinforcing normative values of manhood in the society.

The concept of protest masculinity in a way exemplifies a conflicting interrelationship between different masculine ideals. If patriarchy is the term for the structural oppression of women, men’s studies have proposed a similar notion of hegemonic masculinity³³. Concurrently, we are also warned to be cautious about labeling any single manifestation of manhood as hegemonic. As Petula Ho puts it, hegemonic masculinity consists of “ideals... rarely attained... but... exemplars in relation to which men can define themselves” (P. Ho 1). In this regard, the dichotomy set up between protest and hegemonic masculinity seems pointless, as they both possibly adhere to the same patriarchal principles and ideals of machismo. Nevertheless, the sense of differentiation created by competing ideals of manhood is, I contend, still the key to understanding the individual masculine identity. It is precisely in this fashion that Wong constructs Zhou Weinan’s maleness in *Children*. As Zhou Weinan’s story illustrates, his version of masculinity often borders on illegitimacy. His conduct also serves as a counter-narrative to the Western conception of protest masculinity. Zhou’s rebellious spirit does not manifest in a romanticized lifeway of street gangster. Rather, when he walks on the streets, he is constantly under the surveillance of the police who occupy a superior social status than Zhou. The fact that he spends most of his time in jail because of drug dealing makes a huge contrast from

³³ My understanding of hegemonic masculinity derives from Raewyn Connell’s essay “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept” (2005). According to Connell, even though hegemonic masculinity can be an abstract ideal, it is “certainly normative... [for] it embodie[s] the currently most honored way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men” (Connell 832).

McDowell's notion of protest masculinity. Zhou's different living condition will be analyzed in detail below through two aspects of his gendered Sinophonicity. Ultimately, like the female characters in *Portraits*, Zhou's story showcases a particular space where lower class Hong Kong men reside.

3.1 The Un-protest Masculinity of a Street Gangster

In the first part of this section, I draw attention to Wong's narrative strategy of using the Cantonese vernacular to paint a different image of a street gangster living on the lowest stratum of society. *Children* sets off its narration from Zhou's decision to join a local gang in Wan Chai at the age of eleven. The vernacular words spoken by the protagonist introduce to readers an ecosystem occupied by illicit business dealers and the police force. Even more so, those words reflect the specific ways Zhou and his like perceive themselves and their surroundings. My argument is placed then at the differentials drawn between such writing and the popular imaginary of the street gangster. To expand on this point, I cite John Woo's films as a point of reference. One of the most respected film directors in Hong Kong, Woo's crime thrillers³⁴ in the 1980s may be said to have captured the appeal of the gangster in the public imaginary. Apart from physical prowess, Woo's emphasis on brotherhood is arguably the most distinctive feature of the hegemonic gangster image created by him. As Yoko Ono remarks, Woo's film "places high value on brotherhood or loyalty between friends, family, and rivals in the homosocial world" (Ono 147). The influence of this aspect of male bonding should not be underestimated, as it creates a new aesthetic of male friendships in action cinema.

Put another way, the combination of "both strength and intimacy" builds up "an erotic charge without the associated anxiety such relationships often trigger within the Hollywood

³⁴ The movies that I recall here are Woo's most representative film pieces in the late 1980s and early 1990s before he moved to Hollywood. Immediately examples would be *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), *A Better Tomorrow II* (1987), *The Killer* (1989) and *Hard Boiled* (1992).

action genre” (Sandell 24). Sandell’s argument refers to the implicit homophobia present in many Hollywood action movies. Such homophobia underscores a differentiated ideal of masculinity from that found in Hong Kong gangster movies. The intimacy forged between males in John Woo’s films thus contrasts with the individualistic protest masculinity of the working-class youth surveyed in McDowell’s analysis. This type of brotherhood ties to a large extent resembles, I argue, the family values operating in Chinese culture. It subsequently conjures up a false moral justification in audiences’ mind for the so called “masculine” conduct. Accordingly, such an image of the gangster is welcomed in most Chinese-speaking communities.

By contrast, Wong’s rendering of Zhou Weinan’s gangster experience in *Children* is anti-heroic and unglamorous. In the first place, the brotherhood ties are indeed depicted through the kinship-like names. For instance, *ahgong* [阿公], originally meaning grandfather, is meant to denote the larger gang organization in which one operates. It nevertheless underscores a prioritization of the collective interest of the gang over any personal ones. Similarly, the word *shufu* [叔父], literally meaning uncle, refers to people in the same superior position as the head of a gang. It also speaks to the hierarchy present in a gang organization. Second, the text sets the start of Zhou’s triad activities during his formative years. As he gains more knowledge of what this life entails, there is arguably a growing sense of disillusionment in readers’ mind about the gangster image associated with Woo.

Here Wong enlists a specific list of vocabulary (scattered around the text) to help paint Zhou’s living reality. Words such as *chuce* [出冊; out of prison], *dajiao* [打交; engage in physical fights], *luozaiye* [落仔業; cuffed by the police] capture the violent, chaotic and precarious nature of a gang member’s life. While these scenes are common on the movie screen, Wong invests some vernacular words with mafia-specific meanings to accentuate the bleak

prospect of living. For example, the gang demands that Zhou contributes to its financial income through *maiye* [賣嘢; selling the thing]. *Ye* [嘢] in Cantonese usually means “a thing.” Here the word “heroin” only appears a few times in the novel. *Ye* thus becomes a substitute for heroin in Zhou’s daily speech. In a way, *Ye* acquires an esoteric status, adding specificity to the eco-system where Zhou resides.

It is through the act of *maiye* that we notice a divide between Zhou’s gangster life and the one portrayed on the screen. Following *maiye* is a series of activities that always borders on the verge of law, thus falling short of any moral justification. Those activities simultaneously form a regiment of gender behaviors articulated through gangster slangs. Zhou’s perception of his gendered self is partially drawn from his understanding of these esoteric terms. Apart from selling drugs, Zhou is also a frequent user. The act of injecting drugs is called *kaidang* [開檔; open for business]. Immediately afterwards, he would pass out, which is called *wu* [烏; doze off]. Both *kaidang* and *wu* have neutral overtones in the Cantonese vernacular. However, their underlying meanings in Zhou’s world serve as a perfect analogy for the neglected aspect of living as a street gangster on the margin of the society.

This marginality is coupled by the fact that the brotherhood ties are built upon a fragile economic system. As Lee Shi-fan [李仕芬] rightly notes, “the so-called brotherhood established here is not manifested in mutual support, but rather [a business network] where one gets assigned to undertake illegal dealings” (S. F. Lee 106; my translation). The illegitimacy of drug dealing business largely accounts for, as I argue, the fragile ties between gang members. At one point, a gang member says to Zhou: “If I’m willing to sacrifice my life [*maiming*; 賣命], he [the gang head] acts like we’re brothers [*banshai*; 扮晒]. What’s good about that” (Wong, *Children* 45). The irony between *maiming* and *banshai* in the quote breaks the illusion of the heroic gangster

image created on the screen. The undecorated, context-specific words are, in my opinion, more affective and effective in exposing the harsh reality confronting many street gangsters in Hong Kong.

It perhaps comes as no surprise then that *Children* is based on Wong's interviews with real-life drug addicts/street gangsters. As Tang Siu-wa [鄧小樺] says, "when *jianghu* [江湖; the world constituted of gang organizations] disappears, and brotherhood turns corporate, [these gangsters] become drifting ghosts" (Tang 1; my translation). Tang's words highlight the changing social circumstances under which Zhou and his like navigate through life. Nevertheless, the drifting state mentioned in her words can also be construed as a display of resistance against the corporatization of brotherhood. This point is supported by Zhou's own words: "Honestly I did know that, I shouldn't hope to depend on anyone. From the start it was about minding your own business (*wenshi*; 搵食)" (Wong, *Children* 30). In this regard, Zhou's persistent refusal to partake in any corporate-like gang organization after the age of 18 is a show of another side of his individuality.

In the next part, my analysis will examine how the resilient side of Zhou's individuality contributes to an understanding of how gendered Sinophonicity operates in Hong Kong. I use Kam Louie's notion of the *wen-wu* dyad as a conceptual lens to explore Zhou's expression of manhood. Harking back to this dyad does not necessarily mean an essentialist approach to Zhou's masculine identity as a Chinese man. Rather, I contend that his masculinity is only substantiated in its relation to the dominant values associated with either *wen* (economic entrepreneurship) or *wu* (the police force) type of maleness³⁵.

³⁵ My choice of representatives for *wen* and *wu* ideals are only strategic here. I'm aware that Kam sees the two elements together as an inalienable composite in describing Chinese masculinity. My intention is to foreground the degrees of deviation made by Zhou from widely accepted masculine norms in society.

3.2 *The Resilient Masculinity of a Child of Darkness*

My discussion of Zhou's resilient masculinity in this part pays attention to Wong's stylistic creation of a nonchalant tone in the protagonist's speaking voice. Such a voice is created out of Wong's literary refurbishment of Cantonese vernacular speech. One example would be Zhou's reflection on his days juggling in-between prisons and the streets of Hong Kong: "A human's life runs so long [*liu liu chang*; 流流長]; how to get through it" (54). The use of reiterative locution in this sentence signals a simple syntactic construction from the speaker. The sentence exposes Zhou's illiterate background. Meanwhile, as Chen Ziqian [陳子謙] points out, Wong "abandons interjections often used in Cantonese. [So] the whole narration is conducted in plain comma or period, even for the interrogative sentence" (Z. Q. Chen 1; my translation). The absence of a question mark at the end of the quoted text sentence conveys, I contend, a less dramatic and sentimental tone. Despite the metaphysical weight of Zhou's statement, Wong refuses to over-sensationalize his living situation through the creation of a natural, calming voice. Examples like this abound in the text. In doing so, I argue that Zhou's resilient character avoids being generalized into a category. Instead it has roots embedded in specific historical conditions.

My inquiry into the specificities of Zhou's resilient character first starts with Zhou's deviated expression of manhood from one prevalent in society. Although I have mentioned that the notion of hegemonic masculinity is problematic, my idea of the prevailing expression of masculinity is based on the precarity of Zhou's livelihood. This economic calculation can be viewed as the *wen* ideal of masculinity in modern Chinese-speaking societies facing the challenge of globalization. As Petula Ho succinctly notes, "wen masculinity is highly valued and resonates with the neo-liberal logic of globalization and business culture, which prioritizes an

adventurous spirit, metropolitan lifestyles, and global connections” (P. Ho 3). This economic entrepreneurship then runs counter to Zhou Weinan’s situation where he depends on pickpocketing to satiate his heroin addiction. However, as the text shows, and in the face of precarity and instability, Zhou’s nonchalant voice may be said to assert a sense of justification for his way of living.

The second chapter of *Children* in particular serves as a testament to this argument. *Children of Darkness* is divided into three chapters, namely *cichu* [此處; here], *nachu* [那處; somewhere], and *bichu* [彼處; there]. Fu Yixuan [符以軒] interprets Wong’s naming of the three chapters as bearing Buddhist overtones. He insightfully argues that, “the three *chu* [place]... correspond with the trajectory of Zhou’s life journey... [with the stage of somewhere] a river with no banks; once one drives into it, there is no direction, no endpoint and definitely no turning back” (Fu 1; my translation). The drifting state described by Fu denotes a purposeless state of mind at face value. Nevertheless, in the process, there is the fact that Zhou manages to survive all the hardships brought forth by his illicit lifestyle. Such survival should be accounted for by, I argue, his great tenacity of character: “Life should be taken step by step; no Ferris wheel ride, shootin’ up high in a swivel. Even that would come down eventually; with some luck, u could still move forward” (Wong, *Children* 80). The calming tone and insightful observation on life embedded in Zhou’s simple words are embodiment of his strength to endure even the most difficult situations. It is in this way that Wong’s writing arguably acquires an affective influence on readers’ perception of underprivileged people living on the margins of society.

Zhou’s resilient character finds its most detailed expression in his confrontations with the police force, which, I argue, represents the *wu* ideal of masculinity. The physical prowess of a street gangster is often highlighted on the movie screen. As such, it is not too wrong to assume

that the trope of the gangster shapes or represents the popular perception of *wu* masculinity. Accordingly, Wong's writing dismantles that idea by establishing a tilted power relation between the police and the street gangster. By tilted I refer to the powerlessness of Zhou and his like. One example would be when Zhou is subjected to police surveillance due to his pickpocketing career: "Once brought back to the cop shop [*chaiguan fangzai*; 差館房仔], thrown into the cell [*chouge*; 臭格], handcuffs on hands, we were treated like shit, not humans; the officers were all double-faced, so never engage in fights with them; no matter what they called you, crackhead [*sidaoyou*; 死道友], sleazebag [*jiangge*; 賤格], scoundrel [*renzha*; 人渣], never talk back" (60). The slang words used in this quote illustrate the ways in which the police and street gangsters perceive each other. Words like *chouge* and *sidaoyou* cast judgmental views on the modes of living for the two oppositional communities. Nevertheless, the two sides are not on an equal playing field. Viewed as a whole, Zhou's words describe the destructive effect of the state apparatus of power—the police force—on his sense of self.

My analysis of the tilted power relation between Zhou and the police in no way condones Zhou's use of drugs or his acts of theft. Rather, in tracing his life paths, we are asked to ponder: "how many choices can a street gangster really have?" (Gao 1; my translation). His illiterate, lower class background arguably places him at a disadvantageous position in the competitive job market. As such, I contend that Zhou's drug addiction becomes an effective trope through which larger issues such as social injustice and unequal distribution of resources are exposed. In this context, the Chinese title of the novel, *Lielao Zhuan* (literally means "portrait of resilient men") is worth pondering over. As Liao Meixuan [廖梅璇] correctly argues, "*lao* [佬; man] means a mature adult in Cantonese. However, Wong Bik-wan chooses to call these mature men children

of darkness³⁶. They are thrown into the world under specific historical circumstances, staggering and stumbling to discover who they are” (Liao 3; my translation). Similar to *Portraits*, the adjective *lie* [烈] makes explicit a journey of resistance and possibly thriving under oppression. Zhou at one point in the text says so himself: “Sleazebag or not, scoundrel or not, it was not up for someone wearing (no) uniform... and having to wait for salary to come out every month to decide. I took on this life path, and I was already paying for it” (Wong, *Children* 60). Here we observe a strong sense of personal integrity in Zhou’s words. His firm stance on his way of life showcases an increasingly assured sense of selfhood.

This sense of self is nevertheless not necessarily linked to his drug addiction. Instead, it is about finding room for expressing his individuality within the grid of the oppressive power structure. I contend that it is from this consideration that the narrative paints the prison as a rehabilitation center for Zhou’s drug addiction: “Brothers [*xiongdi*; 兄弟] usually got fat in prison. Without that addiction [*na wei ye*; 那味嘢], life had a routine, and the hours were regular for sleep [*shuijiao*; 睡覺]” (105). Zhou’s transition to a better life can be observed from the three Chinese words that I highlight in the quote. Both *xiongdi* and *ye* still denotes Zhou’s gangster background. However, the use of *shuijiao* instead of *wu* for the meaning of slumber implies an arguably definitive change in his lifestyle. As the subsequent narration demonstrates, his resilient character eventually helps him transition into a volunteer social worker leading a drug-free life.

To a large extent, Zhou’s drug addiction, while differentiating him from mainstream masculine conduct, still confines him into a site of oppressive power relations. When his drug addiction fades, he is free from the shackles of a certain type of discriminatory discursive

³⁶ The English translation of the title as *Children of Darkness* is based on Wong Bik-wan’s statement made on the back cover of the printed novel. Wong says that the novel can also be called *Heian De Haizi* (literally means “children of darkness”).

construct such as *sidaoyou* [crackhead]. His drug addiction as a metaphor for social pathos is further made explicit near the end of the story. In one instance, walking on the streets, Zhou remarks that “nobody change[s] courses seeing me. I [am] just an average Joe. Even the police wouldn’t look at me twice” (190). Even though the narration is still conducted in a nonchalant tone, Zhou’s feelings of surprise and, to a certain degree, exaltation, filter through the writing. A few pages later, Zhou makes a candid statement: “Once the mind got over that thing [*na wei ye*], and not bounded by it anymore, I was free” (194). The exaltation felt by Zhou about his new life should not be viewed as a submission to the normative codes of conduct. Zhou arguably carries the same resilient character to the next stage of his life, a drug-free one. His new life arguably shows the elasticity of Hong Kong’s social space; it allows gender behavior that goes beyond normative mandates. It is in this way that Wong’s writing in *Children* contributes to an inclusive view of diverse manifestations of masculinity co-existing and inter-acting within the living space of Hong Kong.

All in all, Wong’s construction of masculinity in *Children* has given an effective and affective rendering of the meaning of gendered Sinophonicity in Hong Kong. Her use of the Cantonese vernacular, in particular street and prison slangs, draws a vivid picture of the lived experience of street gangsters/drug addicts on the margins of society. In doing so, Hong Kong’s place-specific culture is shown through the concept of Sino-*phon*-icity. Furthermore, the nonchalant narrative voice, created out of Wong’s stylistic mediation of the Cantonese speech, brings to light the tenacious strength present among many under-privileged, lower-class people. Even more so, such traits are articulated through the lens of gender, thereby lending a more inclusive perspective to the diversified perception of gendered self operating within Hong Kong’s living space. On the last few pages of the novel, Zhou, we are told, begins working as a

volunteer to promote drug rehabilitation. A fellow addict refuses his help by saying “I’m not you” (195). Zhou’s response is as always simple, but also heavily invested with metaphysical overtone: “One person and another, how big of a difference can they be. We just habitually thought that we were different from others” (ibid.). Zhou’s words seem to contradict my argument above. However, I think Zhou here is describing a common experience of resistance and thriving under oppression for many people situated within the grid of a power structure. In this regard, his words stem from his life-long experience of living, struggling and striving, as evidenced in the text. It is with such humanist concern that Wong Bik-wan’s construction of gendered male Sinophonicity in this novel tells a larger story about Hong Kong’s local identity.

4. Conclusion—Performing Gendered Sinophonicity and the Oral Tradition

In this chapter, I have argued for a gendered consideration of the concept of Sinophonicity in thinking about the formation of the local Hong Kong subject in relation to the project of decolonizing Hong Kong. In the first place, Wong Bik-wan’s two novels show that gender conduct offers a useful forum upon which to grasp the nuances of Hong Kong’s Sinophone culture through the notion of gendered *Sinophonicity*. Specifically, Wong presents a broad range of characters under the rubrics of *lienü* and *lielao*. My analysis shows that their gendered subjectivities are shaped in a constant tension between personal integrity and hegemonic gender values. The two terms, *lienü* and *lielao*, are thus perceived as a challenge to mainstream representation of women and men in society. In addition, Wong portrays the characters of *lienü* and *lielao* in the form of oral history. The writing of oral history incorporates the Cantonese vernacular spoken at different levels according to the class and educational background of the characters. These two aspects—the reenactment of *lienü* and *lielao* and the oral form—then articulate a notion of gendered *Sinophonicity*, and in the process substantiate a

distinctive form of Hong Kong Sinophone culture.

Second, Wong's writing exemplifies a notion of *gendered* Sinophonicity by revealing different sites of power relations where a gendered subject is constructed. In *Portraits*, the gendered subjectivities of the women characters are formed within the family domain. In *Children*, the protagonist Zhou's gendered subjectivity is articulated through his experience of living on the streets of Hong Kong as a drug addict. Moreover, although Chinese familialism regulates the characters' gendered behavior in *Portraits*, the exact manifestations of gender of these women vary under different historical occasions. In the third chapter "You," Wong mentions Li Waner's relationship with her mother as well as her grandmother. Underlying such writing is a dialogue between different ideals of womanhood. In this particular chapter, Li's behavior is influenced by her mother as well as by the men in her life. Li's mother, at one point in the narration, expresses her anger toward her mother for her misfortunate life. Li's story thus suggests that, in order to understand women's present situations, we need to conceive of gender in Hong Kong from a historical perspective. In this regard, Wong's writing calls for a multi-layered knowledge production on the formation of the local gendered subject in Hong Kong.

Last but not least, I argue that the lens of gendered Sinophonicity highlights a humanist concern in Wong Bik-wan's writing. Wong's persistent use of the word *lie* in the titles of both works arguably attests to her belief in human's capacity to endure and thrive under any hardships in life. Such a position makes an interesting contrast from the sharp, forceful tone found in her narration of gender injustice and violence. Nevertheless, as David Der-wei Wang puts it, the violent imagery in Wong's writing "springs from a love for the world, a longing for tenderness" (Wang, *Into the New* 334; my translation). The notion of tenderness and violence comes from Wong's famous short-story collection *Wenrou yu Baolie* [溫柔與暴烈; *Tenderness and*

Violence]. In this book, Wong depicts a plethora of characters whose lives are filled with absurdity and violent acts. It is based on this astute observation of human conditions that she “carve[s] out a unique place for herself in Hong Kong literature by representing what hitherto has appeared to be the unrepresentable, which is neither significant nor absurd” (Lau 161-2). In representing underprivileged groups in society, Wong offers alternative conceptual lens through which new ideas, discourses and even actions are inspired regarding gender. In this way, the two of Wong’s works discussed in this chapter participate in the decolonization of the local Hong Kong self in cultural discourse. I conclude my discussion in this chapter by quoting Wong Bik-wan’s statement about women’s status made in an interview:

I’ve always felt that women in this stratified society stand in a less advantageous position. Especially in the developing nations, women have less educational opportunities and are subject to many gender norms imposed by the society. Should they still display their best qualities under this many adverse circumstances, to live life to their best, they represent the most ideal type of womanhood in my mind, or of humanity as well. (Huang & Dung 40; my translation)

If adversity is inevitable in life, the most important thing for women, as well as for men, is to make use of the limited resources at hand to power through life’s hurdles. Ultimately, the notion of gendered Sinophonicity points to a never-ending negotiation between one’s sense of self and the city, in order to better situate oneself in the face of changing socio-political circumstances in Hong Kong.

In the next chapter, my analysis examines the formation of ethnic Sinophonicity represented by Hong Kong native Anglophone writer Xu Xi. The ethnic question is without

doubt an important one to be asked in Hong Kong's decolonizing project. However, it is far too complicated than what is described in prevailing discourses. Xu Xi's works demonstrate such complexity by setting up a subject position operating at the intersection of gender and ethnicity. At the same time, her works probe into the living realities of women belonging to the upper middle-class echelon. As such, they make a horizontal comparison with Wong's construction of lower-class women in *Portraits*. In doing so, Xu Xi's works open up new avenues of inquiry in studying Hong Kong's complex social formation.

Chapter Three: Writing the Ethnic Self—Languaging the Upper Middle Class

Woman in Xu Xi's *Hong Kong Rose* and *The Unwalled City*

In short, if I am inescapably Chinese by descent, I am only sometimes Chinese by consent.

— Ien Ang, “To Be or Not to Be Chinese” (1992)

I'm a writer. I happen to write in English.

— Xu Xi, “The English of My Story” (2016)

The previous two chapters have approached how literature provides decolonizing impetus from the perspectives of history and gender. However, their analyses of literary representations of Hong Kong's colonial formation fail to bring to the fore the topic of hybridity, which is usually associated with colonialism. Popular perception of Hong Kong's hybridity has often rested on the rhetoric of “East-meets-West” propagandized in official discourse, which arguably denotes the contact between the Chinese and Anglo-European races. Such a perception then runs the risk of essentializing both races based on certain cultural traits. Its direct consequence can be observed in much of the public discussion of who counts as a “local” Hong Konger. Underlying these discussions is often an undisputed assumption that those of the Chinese race should be considered as the agents of local culture. This chapter challenges such an assumption by advocating a notion of ethnic Sinophonicity that further contests the hybrid nature of Hong Kong's local cultural formation. Ethnic Sinophonicity specifically refers to the formation of the *ethnic* subject who actively contributes to the social fabric of Hong Kong, and is thus recognized as local. Insofar as race is often used to describe the cultural activities of Sinitic language-speaking communities under the blanket category of “Chinese,” the violence exerted upon marginalized ethnic bodies is often overlooked by the rosy picture of “East-meets-West.” By

replacing the category of race with ethnicity, ethnic Sinophonicity throws light on the multi-layered cultural identification that the ethnic body undergoes. Moreover, by underlining various manifestations of the ethnic subject, ethnic Sinophonicity paints a more substantial picture of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture than the prevailing rhetoric of hybridity. To exemplify the concept of ethnic Sinophonicity, this chapter focuses on two of the Hong Kong native English-language writer Xu Xi's novels—*Hong Kong Rose* (1997) and *The Unwalled City* (2001). Compared to both Dung Kai-cheung's and Wong Bik-wan's Chinese writings, Xu's English texts offer a supplementary look into the complex ethnic composition of the city, which decidedly sets Hong Kong literature apart from the monolithic category of Chinese literature. As such, my discussion of the critical potential of ethnic Sinophonicity will be based on these two primary texts.

Written at the time when the women's movement was on the rise in 1990s Hong Kong³⁷, Xu Xi's two novels expose the xenophobic Han-centrism in Hong Kong, expressed in a language of gender conflict, discrimination, and injustice. Like Wong Bik-wan's *Portraits of Martyred Women* (1999), the two novels depict the effect of Chinese familialism on women, covering the period from the 1970s to the year of the Handover, 1997. However, unlike Wong's clearly stated feminist rejection of patriarchal authority, Xu's characterizations of women are sometimes fraught with complicity in patriarchal values. Such a complicity is the result of their anxiety to fit into the place they call "home." My analysis of ethnic Sinophonicity, therefore, delineates Xu Xi's careful observation of this structural hierarchy along the axis of ethnicity. At the same time, I argue that ethnic Sinophonicity also derives its critical agency from Xu's use of the English

³⁷ The women's movement has always been present since the 1940s in Hong Kong. But as Ching Kwan Lee notes, "prior to the 1980s, the women's movement in Hong Kong was largely the effort made by wives of Chinese elites or expatriate women...then in the 1980s, more grass roots-oriented women's groups were formed, targeting different groups of local Chinese women as their constituencies" (C. Lee 229). In 1994, for instance, the women's movement successfully changed the land inheritance law in Hong Kong, allowing women in the New Territories to inherit land property for the first time.

language to convey the effect of normative ideals of being Chinese in Hong Kong. This aspect of ethnic Sinophonicity broadens the parameters of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture. As Shih Shu-mei's rightly argues, "Hong Kong literature has always been a multilingual literature, including Anglophone and Sinophone writings" (Shih, "Hong Kong Literature" 15). Taking the lens of ethnic Sinophonicity, I expand Shih's point further by arguing for the inclusion of Anglophone writings that speak from a local point of view in the breadth of Hong Kong's composite Sinophone culture.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the problematic conceptualization of Chineseness as a regulating mechanism of (national) belonging. The discussion also touches on the aesthetic appeal of Xu Xu's English writing in complicating such a stable, regulating mechanism. The analysis then proceeds to investigate how Xu Xi portrays the subjectivity of the upper-middle-class female characters in her novels, in the hopes of exposing the latent injustice exerted on minority ethnic bodies in Hong Kong. Finally, this chapter concludes with a further discussion of the potential of ethnic Sinophonicity to engage the public in the conversation on ethnic relations in Hong Kong.

1. The Ethnic Question in Hong Kong—Defying Chineseness

One salient feature that differentiates Xu Xi's writing from other English-language works about Hong Kong is her underscoring of the intra-ethnic conflict within the local Chinese community. This is raised through the characters' conflicted attitude toward the normative ideals of being Chinese. Discussion of the intra-ethnic conflict is certainly nothing new in studies of Chinese diasporic communities.³⁸ In their promotion of the notion of ethnic Chineseness as their

³⁸ I draw my scholarly sources mainly from Rey Chow (*Writing Diaspora; Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*), Ien Ang ("Can One Say No to Chineseness"; "To Be or Not to Be Chinese: Diaspora, Culture and Postmodern Ethnicity"); Allen Chun ("Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of

cultural identity, scholars of diaspora studies consider their ethnicity as a culturally based property which is further informed by their national identities. From this consideration, the intra-ethnic conflict described in diaspora studies is, I argue, largely caused by national boundaries. In doing so, ethnicity becomes another homogenizing concept, denoting a collective cultural identity for a Sinitic community outside mainland China. Such a conception of ethnicity in a way echoes prevailing modes of knowledge pursuit in both mainland Chinese and Western cultural discourses that equate Chineseness to subjectivities born of mainland Han Chinese culture. In one instance, there emerged a nativist cultural conception of Chineseness in early 1990s mainland China based on the cultural values exercised by majority ethnic Han people. According to Ben Xu, such conception is based on the reification of the East-West binary, serving to “rationalize the authoritarian status quo at home” (B. Xu 205). In another instance, Rey Chow argues that the focus on Chineseness has become problematic in Western academia since it essentializes a coherent imagery of the Chinese subject rooted in mainland Han Chinese culture.³⁹ Accordingly, Chineseness has become a homogenizing term, charged with exclusionist overtones.

Regarding Hong Kong’s case, its colonial history and its majority Cantonese-speaking population have contributed to the development of a distinctive cultural space. Nevertheless, such a cultural space still shares commonalities with that of mainland China, due to the historical connection between the two places. One commonality is some shared aspects of cultural traditions between Hong Kong Chinese and mainland people. Race arguably plays a decisive role in marking this commonality. However, as an immigrant city, Hong Kong’s population is composed of multiple, and even mixed, ethnic groups. As such, Hong Kong’s cultural formation

Ethnicity as Culture as Identity”); and to a lesser extent, Tu Wei-ming (*The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese*).

³⁹ This is drawn from Rey Chow’s essay “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem.”

is a dynamic process of interaction between different cultural traditions. People of a mixed-race or those of a non-Sinitic linguistic background can observe the same customs as Chinese ethnicities do in Hong Kong. Hence, race becomes an inadequate category to conceptualize the diversified articulation of cultural values in Hong Kong. As Ien Ang contends, “race theories operate in practice as popular epistemologies of ethnic distinction, discrimination, and identification—which are often matched by more or less passionate modes of self-identification” (Ang, “Can One Say No” 239). Ang suggests that ethnic identification should be a willful process that is enacted by the individual themselves. Such a subversive re-conception of ethnicity is also echoed in Rey Chow’s argument that “the submission to consanguinity means the surrender of agency” (Chow, *Writing Diaspora* 24). Instead of relying on kinship, ethnic identification in Hong Kong can be understood as the Hong Kong people’s shared cultural experience. As Chow Yiu-fai remarks, the ongoing debate on Chineseness is one about “not only what but also who defines it” (Chow & Kloet 59). Yiu Fai Chow’s statement affirms the active role that the ideological agenda behind the act of placing one under the rubric of Chineseness. At the same time, the reiteration of Chineseness seems to prove the term’s deep-rootedness in public consciousness.

Hong Kong’s danger of being subsumed under the rubric of China, with the notion of Chineseness, is most acutely felt in Tu Wei-ming’s [杜維明] definition of “cultural China.” Taken on a symbolic level, “cultural China” refers to the cultural space “that both encompasses and transcends the ethnic, territorial, linguistic, and religious boundaries that normally define Chineseness” (Tu VII). Tu’s definition has a special valence to the situations in Hong Kong and Taiwan. For the geographic and cultural proximity of these two places to mainland China can be easily argued in service of his notion. Despite Tu’s awareness of the different historical realities

of the two places, he is, as Ien Ang points out, “driven, and motivated, by another kind of centrism, this time along notionally cultural lines” (Ang, “Can One Say No” 230). Subsequently, the notion of “cultural China” fails to grasp the radical potential embedded in the cultural practice of the people from these two regions.

Ang’s insight on Tu’s “cultural China” is particularly useful in the analysis of Xu Xi’s works. The characters in both *Hong Kong Rose* and *The Unwalled City* are mostly not Han Chinese (Eurasian and Indonesian Chinese). In their striving to fit in the social circle of Hong Kong Han Chinese, they encounter clashes with the prevailing discourse of Chineseness. Such a discourse is “torn from [Hong Kong’s] historical, cultural and political embedding and lodged in a biologically constituted racial category” (Hall 472). The two novels thus act as a critique of this practice by means of highlighting the cooptation of the gendered subjectivities of the characters. In so doing, Hong Kong is shown, according to Lo Kwai-cheung, as “a site of performative contradictions” which “embodies the fundamental imbalance and inconsistency of the cultural totality of contemporary China” (K. C. Lo 4). Lo’s statement, although aimed at highlighting Hong Kong’s postcolonial condition, also applies to the colonial situation of Hong Kong, as Xu Xi’s two novels will show.

All in all, within the geopolitical context of post/colonial Hong Kong, Chineseness, with its ideological overtones, is insufficient to conceptualize the collective experience of the Hong Kong people. Under such a circumstance, my conception of ethnic Sinophonicity comes to offer a more nuanced view of the place-specific manifestations of ethnic culture in Hong Kong. Calling it ethnic reiterates my previous argument that ethnic identification should be based on a shared sense of cultural experience. This point resonates with Emma Teng’s illuminating ethnographic studies of Eurasians living in Hong Kong in the inter-war years. As Teng notes, in

Hong Kong, “sociopolitical experience, and not ancestry or shared culture, is the most important factor in constituting ethnic groups, and that ethnic identity can have a different basis locally than it does at the level of the larger society” (Teng 224). Teng suggests that, on the one hand, ethnic identification can be approached by cultural affiliation at the individual level. On the other hand, any single ethnic identification (such as Han Chineseness) cannot fully capture the collective whole of Hong Kong people’s life. Teng’s attention to the socio-political experience of people living in Hong Kong thus affirms the legitimacy of a collective sense of Hong Kong’s cultural identity. In the meantime, her argument calls attention to the fact that Hong Kong’s cultural space is a dynamic process of becoming. This is also shown in the two texts under discussion through the characters’ struggles of getting recognized as members of the local community. In the process, they gradually realize the impossibility of such a task, and eventually settle down with their own modes of embodied ethnic Sinophonicity. As Gregory Lee’s words put forward, “emancipatory change... will not necessarily imply a ‘cleansing’ of the non-authentic, but a redeployment and détournement of hybridized and local practices with the aim of imagining that new future” (G. Lee x). To put Lee’s words another way, the female characters in Xu Xi’s two novels are active participators in articulating their differentiated conceptions of being ethnic Chinese individuals in Hong Kong. Even though their effort to do so is compromised in the end, the textual construction of their effort can provide useful insight for other artistic or critical work to draw upon. Together, Xu Xi’s works substantiate the vitality of Hong Kong’s hybrid cultural formation, and differentiate it from mainland Chinese ethnic culture.

2. Xu Xi’s English—A Hong Kong Sensibility

Compared to my previous two chapters, the ethnic Sinophonicity constructed in Xu Xi’s

works is carried out through the medium of the English language. The focus on the English language merits our scrutiny, especially considering the context behind Hong Kong. Born and raised in Hong Kong, Xu Xi claims both Chinese and Indonesian origins. Because of her parents' different linguistic capabilities, she speaks English at home. The English she learned at home is a rather creolized one since, as Xu notes, her "parents speak it as a second language" (Xu, "Writing" 420). Meanwhile, living in Hong Kong has also taught Xu to speak Cantonese fluently. As her Indonesian heritage is physically visible, however, her claim to be a local is often challenged, or at least suspected: "My linguistic abilities in Cantonese and my familiarity with the city they know makes me suspiciously local" (417). This complex linguistic background has led to a series of misunderstandings about Xu's cultural identity. As her writings often touch on similar issues, the texts thus provide a fertile ground for the study of Sinophonicity. On one occasion, Xu Xi even threw out a bold statement: "I must stop being Chinese... it is just too complicated" (Xu, "Why" 40). Her personal frustration aside, such a statement reveals the social reality confronting those who are ethnically mixed in Hong Kong. Being of Han Chinese descent, according to her, guarantees one the privileged position of being the indubitable local.

Xu Xi's situation can be best understood through Jing Tsu's notion of linguistic nativity, which I briefly discussed in the introductory chapter. To reiterate it, linguistic nativity describes a common misconception that "each speaking subject is assumed to come already armed with a language of his or her own" (Tsu 3). This language, called the native tongue, is deemed an immanent, a priori endowment of an ethnic body. Thus, linguistic nativity consigns the interpellation of national ideologies on the formation of that ethnic speaking subject to oblivion. Consequently, linguistic nativity successfully establishes an imagined community at the local (and also national) level, operating on an emotional connection between native tongues and

personal belonging. In the case of Xu Xi, the native tongue of her living environment is Cantonese. Even though she can claim her belonging to the local community, her linguistic allegiance is far too complicated. As such, her upbringing brings up a confounded and compounded view of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture, one which is articulated through her use of English.

The objective behind the use of linguistic nativity as a lens for the texts in this chapter is to distinguish Xu's English writing on Hong Kong from the majority of other English Hong Kong narratives that are often written by white expatriates. I also aim to highlight how the prevailing rhetoric about the co-existence of English and Chinese languages, in both written and spoken forms, in Hong Kong often disguises the violence contained in the act of languaging. This violence is depicted as a cut by Rey Chow, a cut that is "asymmetrical, nonmutual, and unsuturable" (Chow, *Not* 7). Although Chow is describing the tilted power hierarchy in the French colonies here, her view on languaging as an act of violence is applicable to my analysis here as well. Given Hong Kong's colonial history, the local Chinese community is often considered excluded by the colonial ruling class. On the linguistic front, the late poet Leung Ping-kwan [梁秉鈞] notes this condition well: "in the society I grew up in, the use of English was associated with a particular privileged status, which I found myself quite removed from and immune to" (P. K. Leung 200). Xu Xi's lived reality, however, suggests that her "privileged" command of the English language contrarily denies her desire to be recognized as a member of the local Cantonese-speaking community. As she comments, "to write in English therefore meant one of two things. Either I was a part of that Chinese bilingual elite or I belonged to the non-Chinese and/or mongrel caste who might or might not be 'elite'" (Xu, "From and Of the City" 22). Even in her own classification, Xu Xi is unable to, I contend, articulate the intricacies of the

inner workings of ethnicity intersecting with class. In the two novels under discussion here, the characters are depicted to be from a range of ethnic backgrounds whose class status often forces them to compromise on their expression of individuality. The marginality experienced by these characters is also reinforced stylistically through Xu's attempt to construct a local subject in the English language. Xu's English Hong Kong story thus in a way reveals the xenophobia of the local Chinese community toward other ethnic groups. Concurrently, writing in English can be understood as an alternative way to approach the Hong Kong experience⁴⁰.

Nonetheless, it would be problematic to simply assume that, since English writings in Hong Kong occupy a minority place compared to Chinese Hong Kong writings, Xu Xi's works naturally are of a subversive nature. This is a crucial distinction to make, for we too need to be cautious with the workings of linguistic nativity in the use of the English language. In other words, will the English writing carry, involuntarily or purposely, the biases or prejudices prevalent in most Euro-centric cultural discourses? After all, Xu Xi's English speaking practice is sustained throughout her formative years. To put it into perspective, Xu is more exposed to Euro-American cultural values compared to the characters in *Portraits*. As such, my reading of her works also investigates the way she infuses a renewed affectivity in her English writing. As Yasemin Yildiz demonstrates in her book *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, "different languages can and do elicit heterogeneous affective investments and emotional reactions" (Yildiz 13). Notably, Xu's renewed sensibility does not come naturally. It is slowly acquired, as Xu struggles to find her voice through the English language. Louise Ho, a Hong Kong native Anglophone poet, emphatically writes that "a writer using the English language to write about Hong Kong

⁴⁰ I am thinking of Ha Jin as an example. As a Chinese residing permanently in America, Ha Jin writes his China fictions in English. From the critical acclaims he has garnered, Ha Jin has attested to the possibility of expressing one cultural sensibility through another language. In a way, he dismantles the myth that the "mother tongue is endowed with an ontological purity and authenticity to which only a native writer can excel at her or his disposal" (Ng 154). Meanwhile, his English writing arguably provides a critical distance from which he can think of China in fresh and new light.

sensibilities is, in effect, translating them into English sensibilities” (L. Ho 383). While the sentence may hold some truth with regard to Ho’s creative process, I argue that Xu Xi’s writing is the product of mutual translation between Cantonese and English sensibilities. This mutual translation involves a process where “the irreducible differences between [the two cultural sensibilities] are fought out, authorities invoked or challenged, ambiguities dissolved or created and so forth, until new words and meanings emerge” (L. Liu 26). Xu Xi explains this process in her own words: “when my characters are speaking in English but thinking in Chinese, or speaking in Chinese that I represent in English on the page, I discovered that word choice or syntax can often embrace Chinese expressions, grammar or syntax” (Xu, “The English” 124). In other words, what makes Xu’s works so Sinophonic is how she centers the conflict of language in her depiction of ethnic discrimination in Hong Kong. This conflict of language is achieved through some metafictional moments in the writing that make overt a dialogue between how English and Chinese languages convey a Cantonese sensibility, one that is historically changing all the time. This point will be explained more in detail in the following textual analysis. Overall, Xu Xi’s writing as such exemplifies the function of ethnic *Sinophonicity* by foregrounding literature’s aesthetic capacity to invoke alternative ways of thinking of Hong Kong in a fresh way.

It is in this fashion that this chapter chooses *Hong Kong Rose* and *The Unwalled City* as the primary texts to investigate the inherent structural problems concerning ethnicity in Hong Kong. To make those problems even more ostensible, Xu simultaneously situates her characters in a contested site of gender struggles. As Allen Chun’s argues, “the semantic nature of ethnicity is probably less important than the recognition of speech contexts wherein ethnicity can be seen as a relevant variable among many possible constituents of identity” (Chun 132). Considering

this, the analysis focuses on the articulation of the ethnic Sinophonicity of three female characters from the two works—Andanna and Gail from *The Unwalled City* and Rose from *Hong Kong Rose*. I first analyze Andanna's story, which represents the confusion and paradoxes experienced by the majority Hong Kong people in the face of the 1997 Handover. My analysis of Andanna's story delineates how cultural conflict within Hong Kong can be observed through the lens of language. This argument is further developed through a discussion of Xu Xi's characterization of the Indonesian Chinese character Rose in section four. By discussing Rose's relationship with her liberal-minded sister Regina, her homosexual husband Paul and her extra-marital lover Elliot, I highlight how Xu Xi's English narrative reveals the compromising effect of Chinese familialism in Hong Kong on women's gendered behavior. In doing so, my analysis dives into the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender confronting the upper-middle class elite women in 1970s Hong Kong. The intra-ethnic conflict discussed in Rose's story continues to be featured in the bi-racial character Gail's story of 1990s Hong Kong where the discourse of a cosmopolitan local identity prevails. My analysis of Gail's ethnic Sinophonicity in section five underlines Xu Xi's depiction of the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender engendered by a different set of power relations outside the institution of family. Such an analysis forms a useful comparison with Rose's story, showcasing the aesthetic potentials of Xu Xi's novels to lend historical insight to Hong Kong's self-positioning vis-à-vis mainland China and global capitalism in the post-Handover years.

3. The Tale of Andanna—The Paradox of a Hong Kong Chinese

In this section, I focus on the subjectivity of a Hong Kong Chinese woman, Andanna, whose ethnic and gender identity is deemed unproblematic and neatly perceived. In many ways, Andanna in *The Unwalled City* is the archetype of the majority Han Chinese in Hong Kong. Her

expression of ethnic Sinophonicity therefore serves as a political allegory of the confusion and paradoxes experienced in Hong Kong's negotiation for a nuanced representation of its cultural heritage in cultural discourse. Even though the topic of the 1997 Handover has been common in literary discourse, I suggest the centering of the question of language allows readers to see from a new angle how strongly contested this topic is. The ethnic Sinophonicity stemmed from this point of view then puts into perspective the public discussion of Hong Kong's political situation today, thus serving as an act of decolonization. My following analysis will be based on this premise, highlighting Xu Xi's unique aesthetic construction of a Hong Kong at the crossroads.

Published in the immediate years after the Handover, *The Unwalled City* retrospectively taps into "the nature of Hong Kong's evolution during [the] pre-handover period—what people did with their lives and the societal and even linguistic context of their days" (Xu, "Writing" 424). It weaves together the life stories of four different characters, two local and two American expats. Andanna is, again, described as the quintessential Hong Konger—ethnically Han Chinese, but culturally hybridized. Her hybridized cultural upbringing is reflected through her conflicted feelings about two languages, Cantonese and English. Such conflicted feelings are embodied in the text through the trope of music. At the outset, Andanna presents herself as a deadbeat working-class figure. Crammed in a tiny shabby apartment with her aspiring Jazz musician boyfriend Michael, she stands on the opposite end of the stereotypical fast-paced, money-minded Hong Kong lifestyle that we know from mass media and popular culture. Nevertheless, Michael and Andanna live a lifestyle that is rendered "cool," albeit undesirable by the majority of pragmatic Hong Kongers. Their pursuit of a non-popular genre of music, Jazz to be precise, puts them in a marginal place in the marketplace. The jazz music that they perform requires them to sing English lyrics in a society where Cantonese dominates. Despite the fact that she "can't stand

speaking English,” Andanna nonetheless has to engage with the English language due to the lyrics she sings in order to make a living, and thus experiences a bohemian Hong Kong life because of it (Xu, *The Unwalled City* 182).

Andanna’s situation arguably performs an extradiegetic function, one whereby Xu Xi reflects the unease of writing a local Hong Kong experience in English. Unlike Xu Xi the author who finds herself a proper voice through writing in English, Andanna, however, falls gradually out of love with jazz. This can be inferred from her view of her boyfriend’s love of jazz:

“Michael was too old fashioned and stubbornly purist” (76). Jazz is a foreign pursuit in Andanna’s eyes; she is not able to translate it into a cultural bearing that suits her Hong Kong sensibilities. As the text proceeds, we observe a desire in Andanna to move towards Canto-pop out of a pragmatic consideration, as it is a more lucrative genre than jazz.

At a symbolic level, Andanna’s preference for the local music genre suggests a movement of sustaining a distinctive local identity in postcolonial Hong Kong during the Handover period. This can be further explicated by Michael’s contrasting position on Jazz music. Michael’s persistent pursuit of Jazz is, on the one hand, a counter-narrative to the hegemony of mainstream Canto-pop in Hong Kong’s music industry. On the other hand, his determination to leave Hong Kong for the United States to pursue his Jazz career reveals his loss of touch with Hong Kong’s own cultural particularities. In a sense, Michael’s “purist” attitude towards Jazz music represents his direct grafting of this western music genre onto his own cultural sensibilities. There is no necessary process of his own indigenization into the Hong Kong context involved when he attempts to connect with the local audience through his Jazz performances. Accordingly, his failure to sustain a Jazz career in Hong Kong gives an escapist hue to his decision to leave the city for the States where Jazz music has more audience. With the handover timeline looming

large in the background of the novel, Andanna's strategic choice of Canto-pop, on the contrary, represents an insistence on Hong Kong's distinctive cultural identity vis-à-vis mainland China.

Deeply rooted in Hong Kong soil, Canto-pop as a music genre arises from a combination of local creative energies and a variety of cultural influences elsewhere. It is also a genre that hallmarks the Cantonese language in a celebratory way. Singers like Leslie Cheung, Andy Lau and Anita Mui have influenced generations of youths locally regarding their perception of their own identities and globally regarding what Hong Kong culture is. As such, like local television and film productions, Canto-pop is an effective tool for the dissemination of a collective sensibility. For instance, halfway through the novel, Andanna attends Michael's farewell party for his imminent study in the States. Upon hearing a perfect rendition of a jazz song, Andanna undergoes a revelation: "She was right to have left [Michael], right to have gone back home. Now she could become her kind of singer, here in Hong Kong, instead of running off to sing a foreign music in a foreign land" (199). Andanna's emotional attachment to Hong Kong as her home, and Cantonese as her native language, is thus seen clearly through her investment in Canto-pop. However, as mentioned previously, Andanna's transition from Jazz to Canto-pop is largely out of a practical consideration, rather than a culturally informed one. She regards performing Canto-pop as a much more promising and easy way to earn a living.

As a mainstream performing art, the aesthetics of Canto-pop is embedded in the dominant masculinist ideology of Hong Kong Chineseness. By transitioning to Canto-pop, Andanna subjects herself to the gender ideology embedded within Canto-pop. This is shown in one instance where Andanna has an affair with her boyfriend Michael's best friend Tai Jai. The sexual experience brings her to her first orgasm. Afterward, when she looks at herself in the mirror, she wonders:

Surely she must look different. Long legged and small waisted, with a real 34-B bustline, her figure... turned men's heads wherever she went, no matter what she wore... Flawless skin, not a hint of a blemish... Her eyes were naturally rounded, framed by long, thick lashes. They slanted perfectly, and if she narrowed them at just the right angle, she could manufacture a sexy, feline gaze that photographed well. She traced her finger around the outline of her "lipstick ad mouth," so dubbed by some smart ass creative, and wondered about these lips that some photographer had once told her were "too hot to kiss." (78)

The mirroring of the self that occurs in this scene is at once Andanna's act of recognizing both her ethnic features and her feminine beauty. Andanna's description of her beauty, exemplified by the phrase "lipstick ad mouth," gives context to how female body is objectified under male gazes in society. At the same time, the "performance" of female beauty, to borrow Butler's term, is notably initiated by Andanna herself in this scene. She knows how to manipulate her beauty, which is to say her bio-capital, to advance her career. As such, her revelation can be construed as either a sign of willing subjectivation or playful subversion. Either way, the textual construction of such gender performativity keeps Andanna's own perception of ethnic and gender identity at a critical distance. Her articulation of her ethnic Sinophonicity thus deviates from the normative representation of Hong Kong Chinese females who have internalized patriarchal gender norms. More precisely, it overthrows the legitimacy of homogenizing precepts such as a unified Hong Kong Chineseness, thus urging readers to think about the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity operating at the formation of the local Hong Kong subject.

It requires further scrutiny to dispel the notion of a uniform, or homogenous, Hong Kong cultural identity, particularly when I intend to argue for a distinctive Hong Kong culture through

Andanna's story, as mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, the word "distinctive" is not synonymous with "uniform" in conceptualizing Hong Kong's cultural identity. Instead, by "distinctive" I also argue for a multifarious perspective of Hong Kong's Sinophone space that allows different, and even competing, cultural ideologies to interact and co-exist. My analysis of Andanna's mirroring of self in the passage above is illustrative of the multiple facets that Hong Kong culture is able to signify. However, that Andanna recognizes the masculinist cultural discourse underpinning her performance of gender does not substantiate Hong Kong's particularities. At the basic level, there exist similarities between the Hong Kong Chinese values and those of mainland China regarding gender. These similarities can be shown through the example of Hong Kong martial arts movies. As Man-Fung Yip notes, martial arts cinema at its early stage "engaged more with horizontal transnational exchanges through processes of translation and hybridization" in the production process (M. F. Yip 189). Subsequently, audiences from regional (East Asian and Southeast Asian) and global Sinitic language-speaking communities can all identify with some familiar cultural elements in the movies, such as Chinese notions of masculinity and traditional Chinese values. In turn, the wide circulation of such movies like Jackie Chan's has, to some extent, contributed to the homogenization of concepts such as Chinese masculinity and femininity. From this consideration, the gender ideology that objectifies Andanna's Chinese feminine beauty can arguably be applied to explain similar issues in mainland China and elsewhere. Thus, in order to come to comprehensive understanding of Hong Kong's distinctive culture, it cannot be approached merely from the perspective of gender.

In analyzing Wong Bik-wan's *Portraits of Martyred Women*, the above issue regarding gender has also been mentioned in chapter two. As I have argued, Wong finds her solution through her stylistic rendering of a colloquial Cantonese speech context in which her characters

tell their stories. Similarly, here in *The Unwalled City*, Xu Xi adds specificity to Andanna's articulation of Sinophonicity by underscoring a language conundrum in postcolonial Hong Kong. For instance, Andanna's manager Colleen keeps reminding Andanna that she should learn Mandarin for future career considerations. Citing the names of famous stars, Colleen claims "many of the big name performers could handle both dialects. Some of the Taiwan and mainland singers even [sing] in Cantonese now" (Xu, *The Unwalled City* 200). Colleen's consideration of both Mandarin and Cantonese dialects gives them equal status. Andanna's immediate response, "why [do] things always have to be *difficult*["?]", hints at neither a rejection nor acceptance of Colleen's suggestion (ibid.). At another point in the text, Xu Xi allows three languages to appear in the text:

"Wei, leng leui." Albert's voice floated towards them during the break after the first set.

"Bu jiang Guangdong hua." Colleen's command that he not speak Cantonese.

"Meih dou gau chat." '97 hasn't arrived, he declared in Cantonese.

"Putonghua hai bu shi Xianggang de mu yu." Putonghua isn't Hong Kong's mother tongue yet, he added, in Mandarin. (199-200)

The political tension in Hong Kong during the pre-handover years is embodied in a language tussle between the speakers here. Xu Xi's English rendering of this scene additionally makes it clear that the struggle is not only between Mandarin/China and Cantonese/the local, but also with English/Hong Kong's history. In doing so, Hong Kong's historical particularities are fully shown to readers. In Andanna's case again, this conflict between powers is manifest in, for one, her reluctance to learn Mandarin. For another, Andanna chooses to perform Canto-pop songs with classical music elements as her specialty, as she had learned western classical music in university.

The songs that she performs thus deviate slightly from the modern type of Canto-pop played on popular media. In this way, Andanna occupies a paradoxical position where she is subjected to the dominant identity discourse in Hong Kong through her performance of Canto-pop, while simultaneously resisting it with her own deviated articulation of western classical music elements.

Andanna's choice of music genre, therefore, demonstrates that the distinctiveness of Hong Kong's culture lies in its inclusion and incorporation of different cultural elements within a single space. By virtue of this, Hong Kong's culture is kept alive by the dynamic nature of its formation. However, this dynamic formation does not preclude the contradiction, dissonance, and ruptures caused by the interactions among these various elements. This view also finds resonance in Ka-Ming Wu's invocation of the term "the north-bound project" in discussing the transnational cultural formation between Hong Kong and mainland China. The term refers to Hong Kong's outward economic and cultural expansion in mainland China after the implementation of the "reform and opening up" policy. According to Wu, the term describes "the process not only as economic exploitation of mainland labor by Hong Kong capitalists but also as a heavy investment of Hong Kong cultural industries in the mainland, where images of Hong Kong singers and idols, videos, films, magazines, and novels abound" (Wu 133). Wu interestingly views Hong Kong's active participation in trans-regional activities as a form of exploitation. This view thus subverts the popular narrative where Hong Kong is the weaker player vis-à-vis China in the city's postcolonial era. It affirms the strength and vitality of Hong Kong's culture, as well as exposing its exploitative potential, often veiled, if without critical supervision.

Applying the above to view Hong Kong's culture on the local level, I seek to draw attention to how certain cultural values often take precedence in disseminating the knowledge of

what Hong Kong's Sinophone culture entails. Subsequently, critical evaluation is needed to resist any prevailing lopsided discourse of such a disposition. This need for critical evaluation is also present in the text. At the end of the novel, Andanna's aspiration as a singer seems to waver as she wonders whether she should do something else. Her uncertainty stems from an escapist desire to avoid the heavily routinized work associated with a pop career. However, there is no guarantee that her alternative career choice, possibly as a dancer, will not put her in the same position as her current one in music. At the symbolic level, Andanna's uncertainty thus can be understood as a manifestation of her paradoxical Sinophonicity. On the one hand, her move away from performing Canto-pop signifies her resistance to the objectification and commodification of her feminine beauty in such an industry. On the other, if she were to go into the field of another performance art, she would then continue to subject herself to the same dominant gender and cultural ideology in Hong Kong. The root of Andanna's predicament is, as I argue, her lack of a critical examination of the available cultural discourses in circulation. Hence, she is not able to link her personal problems with the structural deficiencies of Hong Kong's current social, economic, and political system. In the process of conceptualizing her own subjectivity, her strategy of going with the flow limits her potential radical agency therein. Andanna's story, therefore, shows one example of how gendered, ethnic subjectivities can be co-opted by the official masculinist discourse of Chineseness.

There is another observable thread in Andanna's narration on her family's loosening grip on her life choices. It should be noted that Andanna's self-fashioned marginalization is enabled by her affluent background. In moments of weakness, she has the option to fall back on her family's support and connections. This aspect of her behavior is arguably another manifestation of her paradoxical Sinophonicity. Her family, hence, is likened to the power apparatus for the

production of normative ideals of Chineseness. Indeed, the individual woman's relationship with her family is an important trope in literary representations of the city. Especially in a society like Hong Kong where the basic social unit is the family, familial ideology has direct bearings on the self-fashioning of the ethnic body. The next section thus will move on to discuss how the gendered, ethnic subjectivity of Rose from *Hong Kong Rose* is co-opted by familial ideology in Hong Kong.

4. The Tale of Rose—The Compromise of an Indonesian Chinese

This section focuses on the character development undertaken by the protagonist, Rose, in the novel *Hong Kong Rose*. Set in 1970s Hong Kong, the novel traces the eponymous Rose's relationship with her Eurasian husband Paul, who is homosexual, as well as with Elliot, with whom she has an extra-marital affair. In the process, Xu Xi provides a moving portrayal of Rose, who is caught between the pressure to retain a proper "face" in culturally conservative Hong Kong, and the ideal of experiencing free love in a laissez-faire capitalist state. I argue that Rose's ethnic Sinophonicity draws attention to the intersectionality of race and gender, thus deepening our understanding of Chinese familialism as delineated in Wong Bik-wan's *Portraits*. Chinese familialism in this case does not merely manifest in an imperative for one to adhere to patriarchal gender norms. It contains a much larger degree of force of oppression, as the imperative to perform Han Chineseness in Hong Kong. The word Chineseness, as discussed in my theoretical analysis, is used here as a homogenizing racial marker, engulfing any nuanced manifestations of ethnic culture within its boundaries. An analysis of Rose's ethnic Sinophonicity vis-à-vis normative ideals of Chineseness successfully separates Xu Xi's writing from Wong Bik-wan's *Portraits* and other writings about Hong Kong women. As my analysis will show, *Hong Kong Rose* marks a set of new aesthetic potentials for Hong Kong's distinctive Sinophone cultural

space, therefore substantiating an act of decolonization. In view of this, the analysis of Rose's articulation of ethnic Sinophonicity is divided into several parts. The first part provides a contextualization of the formation of Rose's individual subjectivity in relation to the Chinese familial ideology in Hong Kong. The analysis then investigates Rose's conflict with the heteronormative institution of marriage in her encounters with her sister Regina, her husband Paul and her lover Elliot. Lastly, this section concludes with further scrutiny of Rose's view of the Chinese familialism in Hong Kong.

4.1 Women and Chinese Familialism in Hong Kong

Early in the novel, Xu Xi has indicated that family has a firm grip on Rose's formation of her subjectivity. The main narrative starts with the first time Rose visits Paul's family. The purpose of such a visit is for Rose, who was then Paul's girlfriend, to get approval from Paul's parents. When Paul's mother Marion explains about the educational system in the U.S. to Rose, her reaction is deferential: "I knew, of course I knew, but I wasn't sure. Here was an adult confirming it to me at last. It was assuring" (Xu, *Hong Kong Rose* 5). It would be too hasty a conclusion to say that Rose's attitude towards Marion is a self-compromising act. Nevertheless, the word "confirming" used to describe her reaction arguably demonstrates the authority of the family institution in producing Rose's knowledge of self. This argument can be further explicated by Rose's comparison between Paul's family and hers. Regarding the issue of education, to Rose's family, the "idea of education [is] that my sister and I must go to university but end[s] there. That we [need] to choose a course of study [doesn't] seem important" (5). How Rose undertakes her studies is thus deemed a private matter, one that is not to be brought up for discussion. This way of thinking is shown to have been imprinted on Rose's consciousness in the text. In contrast, Marion's probing way of asking detailed questions about Rose's education

underlines a different power dynamic between parents and children within a family. Rose, therefore, feels “unaccustomed to this kind of conversation” (5). The emotions that Rose feels upon being confronted about her education confirms the authority of family culture on her conception of self.

The impact of family culture on Rose’s subject formation is primarily underscored by her conception of gender identity. At the outset of the novel, Rose is depicted to be simultaneously modern, with a western educational background and an independent job, and traditional, in that she heartily subscribes to the gender roles set for women by patriarchal ideology. Rose’s position arguably reflects the status of a larger group of women in Hong Kong; specifically, their access to educational and cultural capital that often masks the unequal gender relations experienced in their lives. As Eliza Lee insightfully notes, “as passive beneficiaries of a competitive, elitist educational system and the thriving service economy, these [female] elites were incorporated into traditionally male-dominated professions and acquired class interests in being members of the professions” (E. Lee 95). The male-dominated professions are, according to Tim Oakes, deeply embedded in “a discourse of time-honored ‘Confucian values’,” for the success of the business of the upper-middle-class Chinese in Hong Kong is built on the Chinese “kinship- and native-placed-based practice of *guanxi*” (Oakes 673). As such, Lee’s argument above highlights a reciprocal relationship between women’s access to resources and the perpetuation of patriarchal rule in Hong Kong. Accordingly, the production of the masculinist gender privilege is systematized through social institutions. The family, as the basic social unit in Hong Kong, is a major site for such knowledge production.

The production and subsequent systematization of masculinist privilege is elucidated by Rose’s relationship with her father James, who is considered the paternalistic authority in the

household. For instance, Rose hesitates whether to ask James why he did not attend her graduation ceremony in the States, as “[i]t would have been too much of a challenge, too much of a questioning of his authority” (Xu, *The Unwalled City* 11). At another point in the text, we find Rose asking her father, “what kind of work do you think I ought to do? I mean until I get married” (11). Or when she complains about the difficulty of finding a fitting job, she defers to the same masculinist rhetoric by saying “as a woman, I’m only going so far and no further” (19). The two instances show Rose’s lack of agency in deciding matters of job and career. Her deference to James is further developed into her perception of marriage as the ultimate form of self-realization. By entering marriage, the paternalistic gender relations are likely to continue in the family institution in which Rose’s individual interests come secondary to her husband Paul’s. In this sense, Rose’s situation is similar to that of the working-class women characters from Wong Bik-wan’s *Portraits*. Together, the characterization of these women captures the structure of feeling of Hong Kong Chinese women in the 1970s.

However, the working-class women in Wong’s *Portraits* are portrayed as lacking necessary economic and cultural capital to fight against the sexual violence and gender discrimination they suffer from men. Under the context of the restrictive Chinese familialism in Hong Kong, Wong’s women must “rely on familial networks as their safety nets” (E. Lee 7). In contrast, Rose clearly belongs to the upper-middle class, and as shown in Lee’s argument above, her access to economic and cultural capital differentiates her from the women in Wong’s novel. In other words, the elite women’s access to resources have the potential to overthrow the fixed gender norms within society by taking up the same role of authority as men do. This is especially plausible within the non-interventionist colonial administration in Hong Kong. For even though there is a collusion with the traditional paternalistic Chinese values within its policies and

institutional systems, colonial government in Hong Kong also allows women room for the expression of liberal and progressive ideals.

Indeed, Rose has showcased her progressive leanings by subtly critiquing the status quo of gender relations. Her criticism is expressed through the self-deprecating and reflexive tone of the novel's narration. For instance, while talking with her father about her future career plans, Rose chooses her words deliberately to cater to her father's sensibility. She operates within masculinist ideology in order to achieve her goals: "Because in his world, women [don't] have careers, only jobs" (Xu, *Hong Kong Rose* 12). Rose's conscious performance of her deference is an index of her awareness of the social conditions in which she is situated as a woman. The performative aspect in her conversation with her father is thus an implication of her subversive thinking. However, it would be simplistic to assume that Rose's family is straightforwardly oppressive and discriminatory towards women. There exist situations where her family encourage her to pursue independence, and not simply be reliant on the institutions of family and marriage. Even for her father James, we are told that, "he really [does] want [her] to break away from depending on family, even if it [means] working" (12). Despite the inherent pragmatism present in his view, Rose's pursuit of independence is still somewhat encouraged. Therefore, James, and by extension Rose's family, arguably diverge from the normative ideals of Chineseness, which is set heavily in Han Chinese traditions, in their encouragement of her to make her own living.

This variant of Hong Kong Chineseness is ascribed to James's past experience as a working class migrant. Born in mainland China, James had moved to Hong Kong after the Second World War and later worked for an American airline as a purchasing manager. Compared to the working-class men in Wong's *Portraits*, it would not be inaccurate to assume

that his semi-openness to women obtaining independence through working has to do with his own trans-regional and transcultural experience. In the Hong Kong context, the characters' class differences need to be put into consideration, in relation to how one's ethnic Sinophonicity is reproduced, as well as how it operates as a form of gendered knowledge production. It is therefore simplistic and inaccurate to set up a conservative Chinese versus liberal Western values dichotomy regarding the issue of the status of women in the city. Such a dichotomy assumes an essentialized unchanging traditional Chinese value system in Hong Kong, where the characters merely have a single possible expression of ethnic Sinophonicity, one that is interchangeable with the norms of Han Chineseness from the mainland. Such a line of thinking subsequently dismisses the possibility that characters such as James have for progressive, liberal thinking. Much evidence in the text suggests otherwise, that its characters are far more capable of cultural complexity than such a dichotomy allows. On more than one occasion, Rose says that her parents are keen for her to pursue her plan to study in the States. Additionally, James's openness to different cultural traditions is also manifested in his favorite types of food. We are told that he eats "[n]oodles of every kind—Indonesian, Chinese, Italian" (43); Rose further comments that he has "an international, not Chinese, palate" (ibid.). Rose's parents thus represent a particular brand of cultural ideology, one that they associate with being ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong, and yet differentiates from traditional Han Chinese values. By account of this, the question then becomes—what does being ethnically Chinese mean for Rose? If it is only to be considered from the perspective of her upbringing, Rose's ethnic Sinophonicity should be identical with her father's. Nonetheless, there exists an inexorable gender, generational and cultural gap between Rose and him. The discussion on Rose's conception of gender identity above is demonstrative of such a gap. The social milieu and historical conditions pertinent to her thus demand a nuanced

inquiry into her subjectivity, formed as it is at the receiving end of her father's own brand of Chineseness.

Bearing the above discussion in mind, the allure of Paul's family for Rose can be better understood when analyzed in terms of her ethnic Sinophonicity. Rose observes a multicultural makeup of Paul's family, which manifests in the languages spoken in the household. Marion, a South African-born-Eurasian, who "look[s] more Chinese than [she]'d expected," speaks only "Queen's English" (4). On the contrary, Paul's father, Paul Sr. with a mainland background, speaks "English with a curious accent, a mixture of Chinese and South African. But when he [speaks] to Paul or Rose, he lapse[s] into Mandarin, which Paul [understands] but [does] not speak" (4). Despite Marion's inability to speak any Sinitic languages, Paul's family still considers themselves ethnically and culturally Chinese, whether in South Africa or in Hong Kong. In Rose's mind, Paul's family occupies a peripheral place in society; she pictures a "marooned" life for Paul's Chinese family in the "flung and exotic world" of South Africa, one that is "in a fashion not unlike the *wah kiu* [華僑; overseas Chinese] world of [her] own family" in Hong Kong (31). A parallel is drawn between the expressions of ethnic Sinophonicity by Paul's and her families. The peripheral place that Rose thinks her family occupies accordingly is reflected in the use of the term *wah kiu*. *Wah kiu* usually refers to the Chinese immigrants and their descendants in Southeast Asia. The word helpfully introduces the cultural background of Rose's mother, who is Indonesian Chinese. Compared to the local Cantonese-speaking population, who are largely descendants of immigrants from mainland China, the cultural heritage of Rose's family is accordingly more complex. The word *wah kiu* thus connotes Rose's self-awareness of her multicultural lineage, and arguably her unease about the difference between her family and the rest of the local Chinese population. While her parents confidently

claim their cultural identity as Chinese, she nevertheless recognizes the peripheral place that her brand of Chineseness occupies.

Rose's paralleling of Paul's family with hers is largely based on the similar linguistic setting in her own household. The text goes: "I often spoke to my father in Mandarin, since he disliked Cantonese and claimed he already spoke too much English at work. Regina (Rose's sister) and Mum... almost always spoke English at home, mixed with a little Cantonese, although my mother sometimes lapsed into Indonesian" (47). The mixed language environment where both Paul and Rose have grown up easily builds into a connection between the two lovers. This connection then arguably develops a sense of solidarity that is forged between the two peripheral expressions of ethnic Sinophonicity. As Rose explains, "I could imagine myself in [Marion's] world. It was the reason Paul first took to me, because he recognized me for one of them" (31). Here, through the textual construction of Rose's subjectivity, Xu Xi deepens our understanding of the double strains that Chinese familialism in Hong Kong casts on women. In the first place, women like Rose need to comply with the masculinist gender ideology implicated within their family relations, in order to be incorporated into male-dominated social institutions. The pressure is then doubled for women who occupy a peripheral position in terms of ethnic identification. Thus, upon identifying Paul's peripheral Chineseness, Rose subsequently sees her marriage to Paul as an effective way to secure her sense of belonging to the local Chinese community. As the analysis in later sections will show, in order to fight off the feeling of being on the periphery, Rose stubbornly defends the façade of her marriage even at the expense of her moral integrity.

Given Xu Xi's own Indonesian Chinese background, we might say that Xu Xi projects her own cultural anxiety onto Rose's story. Leo Ou-fan Lee [李歐梵] once argued that "being

truly on the periphery” is a “rare privilege” (L. Lee 226). For the realization of standing on the periphery creates a distance “sufficiently removed from the center of the obsession,” allowing one to “subject the obsession itself to artistic treatment” (232). The center of obsession, in the context of this analysis, arguably refers to the dominant discourse on Chineseness in 1970s Hong Kong, which premises its ethnic policies on Han-centrism. Rose’s feeling of being at the periphery about her ethnic Sinophonicity thus provides, according to Ou-fan Lee, a potential critical distance at which we examine the effects of this Han-centric discourse on women. As such, Xu Xi’s English writing of Rose’s subject formation can be construed as one example whereby Xu, as a literary writer, deploys her instrument of writing to offer a stylistic critique of both the gender and ethnic status quo in 1970s Hong Kong. In particular, the English word “Chinese” has been used to refer to all Chinese ethnicities in *Hong Kong Rose*. In Rose’s repetitive act of referencing “Chinese” as a regulating mechanism of her conduct, the meaning of the word “Chinese” is then shattered as a result in Xu’s writing. In this regard, the distinctiveness of Hong Kong’s Sinophone culture is characterized as “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” (C. Wong 56). Nevertheless, the “chaotic” image, when viewed in a positive light, assures the flexibility of the city space to allow for diversified living modalities. In Rose’s case, her arrival at such a positive meaning is accompanied by a sense of self-abandonment, as my following analysis will show. As such, I term her expression of ethnic Sinophonicity as a compromised one.

My conception of Rose’s compromised Sinophonicity includes two aspects of meaning. Firstly, the term recognizes Rose’s self-awareness, and even criticism, of the unequal relations between men and women. An example is Rose’s tactful conversation with her father where she

discusses her career plans. The performative aspect of her speech creates a tension between the submissive gender role she is supposed to play as a woman and her perception of self as an independently-minded individual. Secondly, her compromised Sinophonicity points to Rose's limited agency in the face of the intersecting forces of gender and ethnic ideology in Hong Kong. Judith Butler's argument on gender performativity is relevant here. Even though gender can be performed in a "parodic" fashion, yet "parody by itself is not subversive" (Butler 139). As mentioned previously, Rose risks her moral integrity to maintain the appearance of her marriage to Paul to secure her sense of belonging to the local Chinese community. In this sense, the potential subversive agency within Rose's thinking is compromised by her actions that conform to the patriarchal institution of marriage. The following analysis will thus focus on the Rose's expression of her compromised Sinophonicity through her relationship with her sister Regina, her husband Paul and her lover Elliot. Her struggles and strife that are unfolded in the process are also relevant in order to attain an understanding of the living reality of many women today that is subjected to the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender.

4.2 Rose and Regina— The Uncanny Doubles of Freedom

My analysis of Rose's Sinophonicity first looks into her relationship with her sister Regina, with whom Rose reveals her awareness of the need to retain her personal integrity against times of adversity. By personal integrity, I refer to the preservation of one's sense of individual freedom, despite being situated within the network of an oppressive power structure. In the text, Regina and Rose are shown to take up different positions regarding such an issue. Both of their views can be understood as, borrowing Nancy Fraser's term, "an uncanny double" of critical thinking about freedom (Fraser 114). In her discussion of feminist thinking today, Fraser astutely points out that the radical potential associated with second-wave feminism has

been co-opted by neo-liberalism in the contemporary era. The outcome is "a strange shadowy version of [feminism], an uncanny double that it can neither simply embrace nor wholly disavow" (114). Fraser cites both Hilary Clinton and Sarah Palin to illustrate how this “uncanny double” of feminism has been utilized in service of the neo-liberal order. In a similar vein, although both Rose and Regina have a strong desire for individual freedom, their attitudes are deeply entrenched in the dominant ideologies of the places in which they live, as I will show in the following pages. As such, their ideas of freedom are at best the uncanny doubles of the politically charged thinking associated with the pursuit of personal freedom.

On the surface, Rose and her sister Regina could be conceptualized to represent the binary oppositions of reserved, family-oriented values (Rose) versus liberal, individualistic ones (Regina). This set of oppositions is metaphoric of the dichotomy between conservative Hong Kong and liberal America. However, reading the exchanges between the two characters, Xu tells us that such a dichotomy is unfounded. Specifically, Regina chooses an exiled life in the States to escape the burdens that she might become subject to back in Hong Kong. However, despite living by the cultural principles in America, Regina’s situation turns out to be no more satisfying than the life she would have lived in Hong Kong. At several points in the text, we are told that she have had suicide attempts due to mental breakdown. Regina’s situation thus calls for the scrutiny of the prevailing individualistic assumption behind the notion of freedom. During one of Rose’s visits to her after Regina had attempted suicide, the two engage in a short discussion on freedom:

“I had such a dream of freedom in America”... “Do you think I could have done these back home?”

“So there’s a price for freedom.”

“You saying I don’t deserve it? That being free means not knowing, never knowing who I really am?”

“It’s not that. It’s just that, well, freedom’s kind of a luxury I think. Americans are born with a bit more of it than the rest of us. That’s all...” (Xu, *Hong Kong Rose* 99)

In this instance, Rose first acknowledges America as a viable space for the realization of individual freedom. By calling freedom “a luxury,” she then critiques the stigmatized view of sex in Hong Kong, which will be discussed in the next section. More importantly, I argue that through Rose’s conversation with Regina, Xu Xi advocates a renewed understanding of freedom that goes beyond individual absolutist ideals. By saying that “Americans are born with a bit more of it,” Xu separates Regina from the local American community due to her different ethnicity and status as a foreigner, thereby pinpointing a lack of structural support within American society for outsiders like Regina to secure their right to freedom. Freedom in this sense includes, in Axel Honneth’s term, “social freedom,” which is understood as “a network of interpersonal and institutional relations of recognition” (Honneth 44). In other words, the feeling of being free is not only expressed through the free choices that one makes when doing something, but it is also, I contend, conditioned by one’s social setting where the possible free choices that one can make are acknowledged as a necessary part of building the local community.

Such an understanding, therefore, rebukes the dominant individualistic assumption of freedom in the West that, as Lois McNay explains, places a "disproportionate emphasis on the absence of external constraints" (McNay 172). For the individualistic assumption, represented by Regina, ignores the structural discrimination inherent in the mainstream cultural ideology of America. In the novel, Regina’s attempts at suicide can be seen as symptomatic of this larger

structural issue. Her continued subscription to such individualistic assumptions about freedom is thus an uncanny double of critical thinking on freedom. As for Rose, the structural discrimination that Regina faces within the American society arguably draws a parallel with Rose's view on women's status in Hong Kong. Her ambivalent attitude towards such structural problems can be understood as another uncanny double of the critical discourse on freedom. Specifically, harking back to Rose's response to Regina quoted in the last paragraph, "Americans are born with a bit more of it," we can discern that Rose readily accepts the stifled pursuit of individual freedom in Hong Kong under the oppressive force of Chinese familialism. At another point in the text, we find her comparing herself with Regina: "Was I the stronger because I still persisted despite Mum, Paul, his family and Hong Kong? ... All I knew was I wouldn't give in to the demons that gripped Regina" (Xu, *Hong Kong Rose* 98-100). Rose is still resilient in the face of adversity. Nevertheless, the non-assertive attitude displayed in this quote describes limited agency on her part, since the extent to which she will fight against perceived oppression remains unknown. This representation of an uncanny double of critical freedom thinking through Rose's perspective is, accordingly, a portrait of her compromised Sinophonicity.

All in all, through the textual representation of both Regina's and Rose's views on the notion of individual freedom, Xu Xi dismantles the conservative Hong Kong-versus-liberal America dichotomy. Instead, she invites us to investigate how critical thinking on freedom is conditioned by, as well as potentially challenges, the dominant paradigm of knowledge production in many respects within a society. More importantly, I argue that the juxtaposition of the sisters' different views on freedom points to a larger inquiry of how we might situate ourselves vis-à-vis the intersecting cultural influences in Hong Kong. Regina's individualistic assumption of freedom essentializes Hong Kong as a backwater place mired in traditional

Chinese values. Nonetheless, her life away in the States serves as a radical antithesis to the Chinese familialism operating in Hong Kong. Regina's lifestyle is a possibility that Rose is tempted to opt for. Especially when Rose and Paul's marriage is in crisis, Regina makes a timely appearance such that Rose can contemplate her life from perspectives informed by a more progressive, liberal cultural discourse. The result is that she manages to refuse the lure of the linear escapist narrative of Regina's, which, as Wendy Gan correctly notes, renders the "varieties of Chineseness as less different than similar" through the "displacing of [the cultural context] from Hong Kong to the West" (Gan 114). In confronting the oppressive force in her life, Rose's insight on Chineseness evolves from her conformity to traditional Han Chinese values into a more grounded knowledge of the socio-cultural particularities of Hong Kong. For instance, after Paul falsely accuses Rose of having an affair with his lover Man Yee, Regina enters Rose's thoughts again. Rose then recalls an anecdote in her childhood about solving mixed fractions: "[Regina] simply never understood how their inherent puzzles could yield solutions if you *tried*... More importantly, I felt she was unfair because she'd never even *tried* to understand" (Xu, *Hong Kong Rose* 229-230; italics mine). Xu Xi is arguably using the metaphor of the mixed fraction as an analogy for Rose's mixed cultural background here. It is also possibly a reference to Hong Kong's mixed cultural space. Compared to Rose's previous comments on merely surviving adversities in Hong Kong, there is a shift in her attitude towards the notion of Chineseness here. Being ethnic Chinese has been an oppressive force on her individuality in the preceding episodes, but Rose has a more positive outlook on the cross-cultural formation of her own ethnic Sinophonicity. However, her transculturality is simultaneously compromised, as she is not willing to take more radical and militant measures against the oppressive forces of heteronormative marriage and patriarchy. This point will be further discussed in the next section

where her relationship with Paul is brought to the fore.

4.3 The Lack of Sexual freedom between Rose and Paul

As discussed in the last section, Rose's sense of her lack of freedom arises from feelings of rejection, frustration and shame that often surface in her relationship with Paul. The power imbalance in their relationship affects their marriage later. Given their upper-middle class and western-educated background, this unequal power relation takes on a very subtle form, one that is still pertinent to gender relations in the contemporary era. As Lois McNay correctly argues, "in an era of formal equality in the public sphere, the family continues to be the site *par excellence* where the 'soft domination' of masculinity is upheld through the inculcation of conventional gendered dispositions" (McNay 176). Seen as an effective means to secure their belonging to the local Chinese community, Rose and Paul's heterosexist marriage pact thus casts a double oppression on Rose due to her pressure to maintain the façade of her sexless marriage with her homosexual husband, Paul. Such a form of oppression results in her articulation of her compromised Sinophonicity. My analysis of Rose and Paul's power relations will take up two parts. In the next part, the effect of the marriage on Rose will be discussed in detail. In this part, the focus is on Rose's acute feeling of lack of sexual freedom in Hong Kong.

From the very beginning of the narration, Paul is set as Rose's undisputed lover and husband-to-be. Their few initial private scenes already seem to, however, debunk the façade of a loving and compatible couple. When Rose first comes back from the States after her college graduation, uneasiness filters through the narrative when she resumes intimacy with Paul. For instance, as Paul is holding her tightly, she "[leaves] him, abruptly, unable to confront all these confusing and conflicting feelings that [churn] inside [her]" (Xu, *Hong Kong Rose* 8). In this instance, we can glean Xu Xi's overall strategy of addressing the latent tension between the

couple from her emphasis on Rose's expression of her sexual desire. The focus on desire, as Petula Ho and Ka Tat Tsang argue in their book, *Sex and Desire in Hong Kong* (2012), "create[s] a rupture that provides more space for the subjective, nonrational, and corporeal aspects of experience that characterize everyday life" (P. Ho & Tsang 24). The portrayal of Rose's sexual desire effectively invites readers to have a nuanced understanding of her psychology. In the process, the innocent, lovey-dovey image that she and Paul present to the world is ruptured. Accordingly, a more complex portrait of the gender dynamics in 1970s Hong Kong is shown to the readers.

The complex gender dynamics between Paul and Rose is first unfolded through a confrontation that Xu Xi establishes between the feelings of intimacy and the "rationalist" acceptance of what is proper. In one instance, after Paul rejects Rose's sexual advance, Rose vents her frustration:

My body remained a mass of nervous energy in bed that night. But [Paul] was right, of course he was right. Things were different here. For a moment, I wished I were back in my own place in America, away from the restrictions of living at home. It seemed absurd that we should have to neck in a park, as if we were still teenagers, as if we were still virgins, especially when we had known each other as long as we had. (Xu, *Hong Kong Rose* 14)

The cause of Rose's frustration is stated here to be the restrictive family-centered social structure in Hong Kong. Such a structure arguably puts a premium on an individual having proper manners, which, according to Rose, prescribes the women's abstinence from sexual intercourse before marriage. At the same time, a stigma is cast upon women who breach this social code. As such, while agreeing that they should abstain from engaging in sexual intercourse, Rose still

craves for a more sexually liberated environment. The tension between intimacy and propriety thus characterizes Rose's predicament in her pursuit of sexual freedom.

Despite her frustration, Rose is hesitant to set the two—her desire for intimacy and the imperative to be proper—in binary opposition. As a result, her comparative insight ends with a melancholy compromise. In other words, Rose's half acceptance of Paul's rejection of her sexual advance explains her paradoxical psyche with regard to familialism in Hong Kong. Her comments on familialism appeal more to the readers' emotions than their critical impulses, as the above quotation shows. Therefore, they lack real evaluative weight and critical sharpness. Underlying Rose's position is her deep emotional attachment to family culture in Hong Kong. Her ambiguous attitude arguably is not in line with the notion that the individualistic assumption embedded within certain discourses on freedom is the panacea to conservative cultural traditions. The text, therefore, calls for alternative and more grounded approaches to the complexity and particularity of the issue of sexuality within colonial Hong Kong.

As the story moves forward, Paul's rejection of Rose's sexual advances develops into a recurring motif. Rose's compromise here registers her submissive spirit. Rose gripes: "[h]e hadn't even suggested a motel. Yet I knew he just wanted the best for me, so I forgave him" (16). On the one hand, Rose's expectation that Paul will initiate sex with her points to a typical assumption within gender discourse in which women are supposed to be the passive receivers of sexual activity. The excuses she rationalizes for Paul further, and quite unwittingly, elevates this matter onto the level of personal ethics. In this fashion, the text explicitly lays bare the workings of the systematic production of gender knowledge in 1970s Hong Kong. On the other hand, Xu Xi's diligent portrayal of Rose's sexuality simultaneously resists the free flow of dominance within such gender norms. Considering the overall stigmatization of sex and sexuality in public

discourse, the narration itself becomes an act of creative resistance that raises the readers' awareness of such an issue. Unlike the working-class women characters in Wong Bik-wan's *Portraits*, Rose's middle-class background—that allows her to be resourceful and privileged—can easily divert people's attention away from the issue of gender inequality. Rose's incessant yet failed pursuits of sexual happiness are instances where Paul's power over her is most acutely felt. As such, the more focused Xu's writing on sexuality is, the more transparent the tilted gender power dynamics in often neglected areas become. In doing so, the text reveals, for one, the difficulty that women have in fighting for gender equality in Hong Kong. Given the social reality the characters are situated in, radical methods of eliminating all types of discrimination are not easy to be put into effect. Xu Xi's writing nevertheless exemplifies, for another, how literary representation can help inspire new thinking by uncovering neglected aspects of gender inequality in everyday life.

Based on the above discussion, Xu Xi's construction of Rose's lack of sexual freedom merits more consideration regarding the question of how it raises readers' awareness of gender inequality. I contend such a question can be approached from an examination of the strong affective impact of Xu's writing on readers. For example, when Rose is about to leave during one of their arguments, Paul makes a sexual advance toward her:

[His] desire hard against me, all the earlier confusion ebbed away, and the world Paul presented made such complete sense that I wondered why I ever questioned it... Then, as abruptly as he had started, he pushed me away and sat up... And with that he got up and left, while I sat there, stunned, my desire in shock, feeling like Paul had just slapped me soundly across the face. (21)

The emotional intensity accompanying Rose's honest bodily reaction in this instance places Rose

in a vulnerable position. Such a way of writing easily conjures up the readers' sympathy of her in their reading. However, the sentimental tone used in the sentences runs the risk of oversensationalizing the conflict, thereby diverting readers from its critical focus on gender inequality. In the vast body of English writings about Hong Kong (by writers almost exclusively from the West), female body and sexuality has arguably been one of the subject matters that has been most written. *The World of Suzie Wong* (1957) is probably the most famous representative of these. What is problematic about these works is that they tend to treat the female body as a site of oriental exoticism. The exhibitionist depiction of sexual encounters, usually between ethnic Chinese (Hong Kong) women and Western men, places women in a fragile position, such as the familiar trope of a damsel in distress. Often, the main purpose of these female characters is to support the individual heroism of their Western male counterparts. Viewed from this perspective, the above instance about Rose's encounter with Paul can be argued to have a similar make-up to such a trend of writing.

Nevertheless, following my argument about Xu Xi's writing as a creative resistance to gender stereotyping, the said instance can also be understood as Xu Xi's deliberate mimicry of narratives such as *Suzie Wong*. By mimicry, I draw attention to Xu's foregrounding of Rose's active agency, as well as her erasure of male subjectivity in the writing of the scene. Even though Rose might be put in a vulnerable position, she is able to see through the larger structural problems behind her immediate situation: "How I hated those evenings in the park ... I know that's how it was for any other young Hong Kong couple, but I wanted more, wanted something better ... Being back in Hong Kong was too much about what ought to be, despite what really was" (34). This emphatic and candid view is spoken at a later period of her life. It denies her male counterpart (Paul) any opportunity to rescue her here, as they are forced to adhere to the

rule whereby sexual intercourse is forbidden before marriage. Although depicting Rose's powerlessness, Xu Xi subverts the valence of the *Suzie Wong* narrative that often occurs in English writings about Hong Kong. Rose's candid view quoted above also proves my argument about Xu Xi's foregrounding of Rose's active agency. Her view additionally foresees a perspectival shift from an ambivalent attitude to an emphatic one in Rose's later dealing with the oppressive gender discourse in the city.

Despite Rose's shift in perspective from her initial ambivalent attitude to her later emphatic one, the difficulty implied in such a change is not to be downplayed. In particular, the unbalanced power relations between Rose and Paul have seeped into every aspect of their daily life. When the tension between intimacy and propriety manifests in the public presentation of their relationship, it forms an enlarged perspective of the effect of gender inequality on women in Hong Kong. For instance, at one social function that Paul and Rose attend, Rose's status is reduced to "Paul's girlfriend" rather than an independent working profession (45). A function like this arguably offers a forum upon which to observe the circulation of traditional values among the elite Hong Kong Han Chinese. In this instance, we are told that the women's supposed supporting role in society is taken as a given, even by Rose herself: "It made me proud to hear that, and to know that the firm [Paul] worked at, Auden, Rose & Wang, was solid, and more important, eminently respectable" (45). The underlying message of Rose's words is that if Paul is doing well, Rose, as a dependent wife, will enjoy a respectable and comfortable life. Rose, who takes a premium on sexual freedom, is shown to have a less progressive view on wifehood, which, according to her, always comes secondary to her husband, Paul. Moreover, her hearty subscription to the supporting girlfriend role should also be ascribed to her perception of her peripheral ethnic status. Being respectable arguably means acceptance into the local Chinese

community for both Paul and Rose. Such a prospect can act as a powerful structuring force for their conduct. In a way, their striving to be respectable accurately embodies the operating logic of Chinese familialism in Hong Kong. Rose's performance as a supporting girlfriend is thus understood as the effect of the intersecting forces of gender and ethnic ideology on women in Hong Kong.

With that said, it should be noted that Rose's agency and sense of self is never fully lost. Her pursuit of sexual freedom already bears traces of qualities associated with her active agency, which eventually leads to her perspectival change mentioned above. However, with her marriage to Paul, the depiction of Rose's pursuit of sexual freedom arguably loses its valence. Given Rose's traditional view on wifehood, it seems that there is no possibility for the articulation of her active agency, let alone her eventual perspectival shift. In the next section, my analysis will examine how such a revelation functions to magnify the corrosive effect of Chinese familialism which is the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender in Hong Kong. In doing so, the tension between intimacy and propriety takes on a new level of meaning. This new layer of tension is again reflected through Xu Xi's affective rendering of traditional Chinese gender norms in English, especially in moments when English fails to convey certain Chinese terms that define the Chinese cultural orthodox. Xu Xi's choice then can be seen as a continuation of Rose's struggle with and striving for sexual freedom before marriage. In this way, the text constructs Rose's conception of identity into a consistent narrative of compromised Sinophonicity.

4.4 Rose and Paul— Gendering the Marriage

Queerness, as Andrea Riemenschnitter argues, can be “subversive... with a non-reproductive, negative, or sinthomatic sexuality as its privileged signifier” (Riemenschnitter 183). The word “privileged” is crucial in deciding the subversive potential of queerness. It puts an

emphasis on the foregrounding of one's queerness to perform a subversive function. In this sense, Riemenschneider's argument is similar to Butler's about parodic gender performance. As Paul's story will suggest, being queer is not synonymous with being subversive, but this queerness can act as an even more powerful regulative force on his conformist conduct. His queerness leads him, we are told, to have a double life, a sexless heterosexual marriage life with Rose and an underground gay life. Rose, in an effort to maintain the appearance of her respectable marriage, acquiesces to the circumstances. In the meantime, such a situation is silently endorsed by Paul's parents, which will be discussed further in the following analysis. Xu Xi's writing of Paul's queerness therefore exposes "the structural violence of the order" operating under the rubric of Chinese familialism while "alerting us to the fantasies structurally necessary in order to sustain it" (183). The sustaining fantasy in this case is the intact image of the heterosexual marriage between Rose and Paul. The violence, however, is most severe on Rose's side, as her behavior is restricted by the traditional notion of wifehood, and more importantly her sense of peripheral ethnic status. Her compromised Sinophonicity is then articulated through a tension between the pressure to retain her family's face and her personal longing for more freedom in her romantic pursuits.

Rose is informed of Paul's homosexuality at a family gathering in Paul's parents' house, ironically without Paul's own presence. The rhetoric used in the telling of Paul's situation is a rehash of the confrontation between intimacy and propriety. In this instance, such a confrontation is added with a new level of meaning. In preceding episodes, Paul's insistence on propriety is coded in Hong Kong's family value-based conservative sex culture, which can arguably be dissolved between Rose and Paul with the advent of their marriage. Here, Paul's parents request that Rose should keep their marriage treading within the boundaries of moral lines, which

denotes the effacement of both Rose and Paul's capacity to express and represent their marriage on their own terms, individually and as a couple. In this regard, the imperative to be proper translates, I contend, as a structuring force that obliterates any signs of individuality. Moreover, the text also reminds us that there is a gendered difference between the degrees to which Rose and Paul are affected by such a line of thinking. Paul's absence in this incident is a manifestation of the much more severe injustice Rose receives as a woman. As a result, family culture in Hong Kong is shown to set more restrictions on women's life: "He's always been this way. But he's also always cared very much for you. There's nothing to stop you from having children and leading a perfectly normal life" (Xu, *Hong Kong Rose* 116). Regardless of Paul's situation, Rose is invariably judged, within and outside her family, according to her fulfillment of the traditional woman's role as homemaker and childrearer.

In a way, Paul's parents offer us a rectified recipe for a successful marriage in Hong Kong. It is a form that resonates with the popular understanding of male-female relations in a family. Even more so, it ensures the acceptance from the local Sino-centric community, which is of particular significance to Paul and Rose. At more than one time in the text, Rose stresses that keeping the façade of a normal heterosexual marriage is justified by her sense of belonging to the local Chinese group: "It was safe here, in this world, with these people who could live dual lives... we were all part of the mongrel caste who belonged together, who found a sheltered haven in our tiny city where the proper face was all that counted. In this time and space, it was a home that embraced us all" (117). Since Rose's family is an immigrant family comprised of both Northern mainland Chinese and Indonesian Chinese heritages, their ethnic Sinophonicity cannot be neatly characterized by the category of Han Chineseness by default. The same is arguably true with Paul's family. In Rose's mind, such a position cultivates a sense of camaraderie worth

defending for in both families. The defending of their comradeship is then understood as their fighting for the justification of their own brand of Chineseness. In my opinion, Rose and Paul's marriage performs the function of containment, whereby difference (Paul's homosexuality, and Rose's home language as English, and so forth) is secured in the safe space of their "home." A byproduct of their keeping of appearances is the justification of their brand of Chineseness through the veneer of normalcy of their marriage.

Such a logic is soon undermined by Xu Xi's portrayal of the ramifications of Paul's homosexuality, which manifest in Paul's incompetence in performing his sex duty regularly. Only on rare occasions does Paul exhibit his sexual desire for Rose. For instance, when Rose comes home from her tryst with Elliot, she finds out that Paul is waiting for her. Paul's jealousy turns into a sexual advance: "It was then I realized he was again exhibiting himself. My body trembled, aching for relief. I went to him, gave myself completely to him ... It was the best sexual experience I'd ever had with Paul" (130). Even in this instance, Paul's display of heterosexuality is arguably hinged on the pragmatic concern to re-establish his marriage with Rose. His performance of the husband role thus implicitly perpetuates the constructed nature of his marriage. Rose's complicity then, viewed at the extradiegetic level, can be construed as Xu Xi's ridicule of Rose's intention to enhance her peripheral ethnic status through marriage. This point is later made explicit as the text moves forward, to the point that Rose draws a parallel between herself and the role of the first wife in a traditional Chinese household of the remote past. When Paul's gay lover Man Yee calls Rose to challenge her status as Paul's wife, her modern marriage starts to fall out: "And that was the real beginning of my marriage, a good old fashioned Chinese marriage, complete with concubine" (134). The fact that the concubine is a gay man adds a new level of ridicule to Rose's abovementioned justification of keeping her

sexless marriage. Underlying Rose's self-ridicule is then, I argue, Xu's attack on the problematic logic of Chinese familialism that is so heavily set in traditional patriarchal value systems, and yet is considered the norm in a city famous for its global connection to other cultures.

As the days go by with Rose's marriage, the strains caused by such problematic logic cast on her are concretized into pragmatic issues. At one point, Paul calls Rose up to demand for a son: "[M]y marriage was all about having children, because in Paul's world, the public image of a happy family life was paramount" (132). Apart from this, Rose had also needed to fulfill her wifely duties on social occasions, including "join[ing] the right clubs, attend[ing] the right balls, work[ing] for the right charities" (134). Compared with Wong Bik-wan's female characters in *Portraits*, Rose's oppression is never less severe than theirs on the front of marriage and sexuality. In this case, her class advantage becomes a bind that hinders her expression of individuality. At another point, Rose's predicament is exacerbated by her clueless mother: "Rose, are you sure you're not barren?" (137). What is shown here is the commonplaceness and vicious effect of internalized patriarchy that faults the woman instead of questioning the man. Despite the arguments mentioned above, I would like to conclude this section by arguing that, in spite of all the oppressive forces in Rose's life, she never wholly succumbs to them. In the face of adversity, the text simultaneously demonstrates that Rose is actively seeking new alternative modalities of living without having to disrupt the dominant order of patriarchal familialism. In this sense, Xu Xi again plays on the function of containment within Rose's marriage to Paul. In the same fashion as Paul uses his marriage to conceal his homosexuality, Rose begins an extra-marital love affair with Elliot to validate her pursuit of free love in Hong Kong. In the process, Rose's relationship with Paul also changes as the power dynamics between them attains a balance through their extra-marital affairs. These topics will be discussed in detail in the next

section, where Rose's relationship with Elliot and its ramifications come under scrutiny.

4.5 Rose, Paul and Elliot— Pragmatic Love and Xenophobic Localism

The addition of Elliot into Rose's relationship with Paul is in itself a manifestation of Rose's rebellion against the oppressive forces of Chinese familialism in her life. It helps mediate the imbalanced power relations between Rose and Paul by giving Rose agential power to pursue her romantic feelings on her own terms. More importantly, it brings forth Rose's own discriminatory views against individuals of non-Chinese ethnicities. As this section proves, Rose's internalized racism against the non-Chinese, Elliot in this case, inhibits any potential for radical measures to end her toxic marriage with Paul. For a divorce leads to the exposure of her affairs with Elliot, which is deemed by Rose unacceptable among the local Chinese community of Hong Kong. During her affair with Elliot, she develops a pragmatic notion of affection, which operates in a similar logic to that of Chinese familialism. Even though she ends this affair at the end of the story, the textual representation of her change of perspective still showcases a conception of compromised Sinophonicity.

On the surface, Elliot's American background gives readers the impression that Xu Xi is setting up the recurring dichotomy between oppressive Chinese traditions and liberal American ideals. A successful businessman in Hong Kong, Elliot's elite position epitomizes the kind of liberal individualism that we commonly associate with the West. Regarding Rose's marriage, he encourages Rose to leave Paul to pursue her own happiness, as he comments on Rose's marriage as "dreadfully destructive" in the sense that "life isn't about appearances" (163). His romance with Rose seems to fit into the prototypical narrative of *Suzie Wong*, with Elliot being Rose's Western savior-lover. However, Elliot's privilege as a free agent is predicated on his status as an outsider to Hong Kong. In an essay "Who needs Strangers?" John Nguyet Erni approaches the

social realities of non-Chinese ethnic groups through the conceptual lens of “stranger,” connoting the inherent cultural segregation made by Hong Kong Chinese toward those of non-Chinese cultural backgrounds. As Erni correctly argues, regarding “the case of the European expatriates, the position of the ‘happy stranger’ has been evident in colonial and mercantile arrangements” (Erni 81). He soon explains his argument by saying that, “[u]nder colonial rule, the presence of the white strangers occupying more privileged government and economic positions was mandated” (81). Erni in his words first affirms the popular knowledge that the racial segregation is enforced through a top-down approach by the colonial government in Hong Kong. Then, by deploying the lens of “stranger,” he forwards the idea that the formation of racism in colonial Hong Kong is a mutually constitutive process between the white European and local Chinese communities. Recognizing the Europeans as strangers, the local Chinese in turn assert their ownership of the place. From this consideration, ethnic segregation in Hong Kong can be seen as a joint enterprise involving both Chinese and Western cultural ideologies.

This line of thinking is reflected in the textual portrayal of Rose’s subjectivity. During one of Rose’s aunt’s gatherings, for instance, Rose is perturbed by the crowd’s un-Chineseness: “This mixed crowd of *wah kiu* and westerners, a sort of *demi monde* of which I was a part, made me uncomfortable tonight. I wanted Paul back, and the safety of our almost-Chinese life, our acceptably Hong Kong life” (Xu, *Hong Kong Rose* 142). Rose states the ethnic isolation between the majority Chinese and other ethnic groups in Hong Kong in an explicit manner here. Despite her mixed cultural background, she still identifies herself with the local Chinese at this point. Nevertheless, her uneasy feeling with other ethnicities arguably points to an ingrained consciousness of “xenophobic localism” (J. Lee 314). An extension of Chinese familialism, such a concept denotes the cultural and psychological exclusion of non-Chinese communities by the

Hong Kong Chinese. In my opinion, this concept of xenophobic localism still has valence within the context of contemporary Hong Kong. It manifests primarily in the dichotomy between the nativist discourse of a unique Hong Kong identity vis-à-vis the nationalistic one supported by mainland China. Bearing this in mind, I further contend that Xu Xi's writing in effect reveals the historical particularities of Hong Kong's coloniality through its characters' psyches, particularly that of Rose. Certainly, there exists a reversed power dynamic between the local Chinese and other ethnic groups (white included) at the individual level in the daily life of Hong Kong.

Accordingly, the textual representation of the impunity, or freedom that Elliot enjoys in Hong Kong should be understood as a latent type of racism. Elliot and Rose's romance is thus not a show of Elliot's individual heroism. On the contrary, it draws attention to the transgressive nature of such an act on Rose's part vis-à-vis xenophobic localism. In another instance, Rose has a conversation with her aunt Helen, during which they touch upon the issue of interracial marriage: "[W]ell, maybe I'm old fashioned, but I don't really think mixed marriages work, do you? Not that I have anything against Paul of course ... because he's mostly Chinese, and his mother adapts well to Hong Kong" (Xu, *Hong Kong Rose* 198). This implicit discrimination against one's un-Chineseness is rarely seen in English-language works about Hong Kong. Helen's words are once again a strong testament to the effect of Chinese familialism on ethnic politics in Hong Kong. As such, an open pronouncement of Rose and Elliot's romance would be considered as an anomaly too. At the same time, given Hong Kong's discriminatory attitude towards women, the exposure of Rose's extra-marital affair would bring more damage to her reputation. In this sense, her insistence on keeping the affair underground is both a coward move as well as her self-protective measure from public scrutiny.

The active agency displayed through Rose's romance with Elliot merits further scrutiny,

particularly when Rose hesitates to call her feelings for Elliot by the name of love. In their initial encounters, Rose involuntarily compares her attraction to Elliot with that to Paul. As she reflects, her affair with Elliot “bring[s] out something in [her] that had remained buried too long, felt like the comfort of my relationship with Paul” (129). Even more so, she feels that “part of Elliot’s appeal [is] the way he conjure[s] up Paul” (170). At the diegetic level, such a comparison can be construed as Xu Xi’s effort to write a language of intimacy that defies cultural boundaries. Accordingly, Elliot’s Americanness is deemed irrelevant to Rose in the face of their mutual attraction. Through her affair with Elliot, Rose also attains some degree of freedom, which is not permitted to her in her sexual relationship with Paul. This aspect is important since it arguably validates her previously pursuit of sexual freedom, and hence her relatively liberal sense of womanhood. Elliot’s affection, in this sense, substantially alleviates her sense of being on the periphery. Nonetheless, Rose’s courage to break off the contract of monogamy is notably premised on the maintenance of the respectable façade of her marriage. By virtue of this, her affection for Elliot is invested with a compensational overtone.

The evidence of such a compensational overtone can be found in her refusal to label her affection as love: “Did I love Elliot? I really didn’t know. I couldn’t be sure what love was, or what it really meant” (203). Underlying Rose’s reluctance is, I contend, a pragmatic understanding of the specificities of her situation. Her sworn love for Paul has given rise to some negative connotations, which are the compromise of selfhood and womanhood. The undefined relationship between them therefore opens a new discursive space where her individuality is cherished and protected. The relationship functionally resembles the private place of the park mentioned in the preceding sections where Rose attempts acts of intimacy with Paul. Whenever Rose and Paul seek to have an intimate moment before their marriage, they would always go to a

park and sit “on the grass in our old corner hidden by a clump of bushes” (8). Within the scheme of Rose’s proportionately divided living space—her parent’s house, her workplace and places for social engagements for her and Paul, the physical locality of the park acts as a safe ground to perform transgressive acts. In this regard, Rose’s fury towards Elliot is valid when she discovers that he has an occasional mistress, apart from her. Elliot’s secret threatens the endurance of the safe space they have created: “I was so angry at Elliot for lying to me, angry at Paul for only giving me half his love, angry most of all at myself for perpetuating the hypocrisy of my life. And my anger grew at my own feelings of jealousy, at my sense of inadequacy around both these men who professed to love and care about me” (200). The outburst of Rose’s strong emotions is interesting to be compared with Rose’s early reaction towards her misery by the revelation of Paul’s homosexuality. Both events are an indication of her increasing sense of self-love and self-esteem. At the diegetic level, Rose’s anger toward both Paul and Elliot is a turning point for Rose’s change of perspectives. However, the disappointment present in the instance is also an example of what can be termed Rose’s morphed sense of self. For her anger directed at Elliot only shows her prioritized appreciation of, and respect for, her own self-value. Her morphed sense of self, therefore, delineates a lack of any realization of the moral fallacy of her actions.

By moral fallacy, I refer to Rose’s downplaying of Elliot’s affection to a relief function for her. Elliot’s unconditional love, as well as his support for maintaining her marriage, provides an antidote to Paul’s deception and indifference. In her prioritization of attaining a pragmatic sense of affection, Rose involuntarily rejects Elliot’s individuality in the sense that she does not see him as an individual, but merely the function he serves, to help her attain her sense of sexual freedom. The result of such a dynamic is that the triangular relationship between Rose, Paul and Elliot becomes a symbolic representation of the Chinese extended family, with Paul as the

husband, Rose as the first wife and Elliot as a concubine. The power dynamic between Rose and Elliot is subsequently fashioned in a manner where Rose becomes the power-wielding agent. Such a change is made explicit by Rose herself in one instance where she gives a candid review of her current life:

I recognized the problems a divorce and acknowledging a relationship with Elliot would create for my family... That was the problem with life in Hong Kong... Reality mattered more than truth, and the reality was that there was simply no need to choose between Elliot and Paul. Why should I? My husband offered me a better life than I ever dreamed of, and a kind of intimacy that stemmed from our long time together. Elliot was about adventure, physical pleasure and a kind of love. I had the best of both worlds. What more did I want? (218-9)

At face value, Rose's complacent attitude can be taken as a celebration of her growth into a typical pragmatic Hong Kong person shaped by its dominant, conservative Chinese values. However, it can be argued what Xu Xi seeks to invoke on a deeper level is a discussion of the fallacy embedded within such logic—that Rose is repeating the violence exerted on her by Paul and their sexless marriage on Elliot in her relationship with Elliot. Rose's remark is an immediate reaction to Elliot's sudden accusation of her unwillingness to divorce Paul. The self-righteousness displayed through her tone is predicated, in effect, on her self-centeredness, which then urges readers to reconsider the polemics made in Rose's reasoning above. What we find is a shocking similarity between Rose's view of her relationship with Elliot and the rhetoric deployed by Paul's parents to persuade Rose to stay married to Paul. In other words, what Rose celebrates here with regard to her sense of achievement in life also translates as a moral principle that too casts a premium on the endurance of a proper Chinese marriage. This moral principle is

nevertheless in itself a violation of the marriage pact in Rose's case. As such, both Rose and Paul enter a vicious cycle of moral corruption through which the structuring force of Chinese familialism is reinforced. Regardless of the containment function of their marriage, the alternative modality that Rose and Paul reach therefore constitutes only a compromised ethnic Sinophonicity, as they are still not willing to take radical measures to end their marriage to pursue their individual freedom on their own terms.

Although an ad hoc tactic, such an alternative modality nevertheless acts as a response to the particularities of Hong Kong's cultural heritage. The last quote especially indicates that Rose has attained a balance as regards the power relation between her and Paul. Hence, as Rose's affair with Elliot continues, Rose's changing relationship with Paul deserves our attention here. As the text shows, Rose's change of perspectives, from being Paul's first wife who silently endures the injustice she feels in her marriage to a perception of herself as an individual who deserves to pursue her individual freedom, brings forth her increasingly assertive attitude towards the direction in which her marriage is heading: "I don't know if that's possible. I have to admit I've thought about divorce lately. Still, a divorce isn't the same as giving him up" (169). As she deliberates the possibility of divorce more frequently, she begins to take the power away from Paul in her interactions with him. In one instance, the tension between the two grows palpable to the point that Rose's aggravation towards Paul reaches its peak:

"*Yuhnleung ngoh.*" He suddenly knelt down, and flung his arms tightly around my waist as he asked forgiveness. "*Ngoh kou lei. Mhou Leihhoi ngoh.* – I'm begging you. Please don't leave me."

The impact of his Cantonese words pained me.

...

“But you can live half a life with me?”

“Yes. It’s worth a lot to me.”

...

He repeated. “It’s worth a lot to me, more than you can imagine.” His words had an edge to them, like Paul Sr.’s had the night he came to see me. “Rose, you owe me.”

I stared at him, uncomprehending.

He continued in an even, composed tone. “You never were pregnant, not even the first time, were you? I knew that. Otherwise we’d have a child by now.”

How could he be so wrong, so deluded? I continue to stare at him in a kind of horror.

“I gave you a life here. You couldn’t have done it without me.” (173)

Here, the romanized Cantonese in the written script is shown to convey the emotional intensity contained within Paul’s pleas to Rose. By writing in this style, Xu Xi reminds us of the workings of linguistic nativity on ethnic bodies. By rendering the affectional Cantonese words in English, Xu’s text sets up a critical distance at which we can gain a better view of how language and ethnic politics are correlated in forming a normalized discourse about the local. As usual, this point is expressed through language charged with gender injustice lashed at Rose. Specifically, the actual content of the conversation is, on the whole, at once a display of Paul’s tactful invocation of Rose’s nostalgia for their past intimacy, and his unabashed narcissism. The intimacy he tries to conjure with Rose makes her revisit her inner insecurity about belonging to the local community. His shameless request made at the end of the conversation reiterates Eliza Lee’s insight that the social mobility of the elite women in Hong Kong is still dependent on their

male counterparts. As difficult as Paul's words sound, Rose has learned to appeal to her critical faculties to assess her situation and make decisions by this point in the novel, instead of merely responding in an emotional way. As she so poignantly summarizes, "I couldn't overturn everything around me. My war [hasn't] ended yet. In my and my father's worlds, the forces of change [are] controlled from without, not within, and it [is] up to us to navigate as best as we could" (190). Her calm analysis regarding how she should handle Paul's oppressive demand is the ultimate indicator of the perspectival shift on her part to a more assertive person who feels strong about pursuing her own freedom and personal integrity.

Xu Xi's ultimate purpose, I contend, is to showcase the extent to which Chinese familialism is ingrained in Rose's consciousness. More importantly, by doing so, she takes Rose on an exploration of the possibility and consequences of living outside the box of familialism. If Rose's current marriage is predicated on moral corruption, a radical break from it becomes a necessary step in order to retain her integrity. In the storyline, the break is accelerated when Paul accuses Rose of cheating on him with his homosexual lover Man Yee. The accusation is accompanied by the revelation that Paul has been spying on Rose via a private detective. This act of moral trespassing in their marriage empties out Rose's residual love for Paul: "I think at that moment whatever love I felt for Paul vanished forever... It suddenly became clear that our idea of family was at the root of all our problems" (222). This is Rose's first time to make an explicit critique of the family ideology in Hong Kong, which marks the success in her shift of perspectives. The ramification of such a perspectival shift is twofold. On the one hand, her realization arguably deems Paul a victim of the family ideology, since Paul cannot reveal his homosexuality to the public for fear of being excluded by the local Chinese elites. In this way, Paul is deprived of any power over her. As the narrative proceeds, though the stakes are high for

the both of them, it is Rose who holds the final decision whether to divorce Paul or not. On the other hand, Rose's critique of the family ideology possibly compels her to re-conceptualize her insecure sense of Chineseness. In my opinion, the fundamental problem of Rose's predicament lies in her desire to conform to the normative ideals of Han Chineseness which she would never attain. As such, her critique should be considered the necessary first step towards a radical break from the shackles of familialism in Hong Kong.

It should be noted that the radical break that I refer to in my analysis is only a discursive construct, one that I use to evaluate the articulation of Rose's compromised Sinophonicity. By introducing this concept, I intend to trace the trajectory of Rose's changing mentality regarding her status as a woman in Hong Kong in order to lead to the idea of ethnic Sinophonicity. Because of its diaphanous nature here, I also draw attention to the difficulty that Rose experiences in thinking of her cultural identity in fresh terms. Nevertheless, there is a significant improvement on her part. At one point in the text, Rose reflects: "Something about being our brand of Chinese, mongrel Chinese—desperate on the one hand for all the important *deih waih*, 'position,' equal status actually with the supposedly 'real' Chinese of Hong Kong—made us hard, but a brittle kind of hard" (227-8). Rose's description of the situation that her family faces is consistent with my preceding analysis. What is interesting in this instance is Rose's debunking of her previous effort to adhere to the cultural modality of the local Chinese group, for the sake of belonging to it. By calling her articulation of Chineseness "brittle," she recognizes its constructed nature. However, a few lines down the page, Rose talks of an unbreakable shell that she finds at a beach: "it wasn't delicate and beautiful, but at least it survived" (228). If we view the two scenes together, the seashell becomes a metaphor for Rose's brand of Chineseness. As I argue, Rose is justifying the unique existence of her brand of Chineseness from within. Even if she has no clue

as to which direction her life should head towards, there is a belief in her that she will power through all possible adversities in the end. What Xu Xi tries to build up here is the mental strength for Rose to withstand her family members' possible scrutiny as a result of her separation from Paul. Ultimately, this belief has the potential to grow into a power that propels Rose to claim her rights to the city as a Hong Kong-born Indonesian Chinese.

Furthermore, Rose's perspectival shift also has implications for her relationship with Elliot. In the face of her potential separation from Paul, Rose is careful to assess her feelings for Elliot. At the same time, the prospect of a happily-ever-after image would be beside Xu Xi's whole point of debunking the *Suzie Wong* narrative through her writing. As such, even when Xu Xi pushes for Rose's radical break from Paul and their sexless marriage, Rose's identification with her Chinese roots is never lost in writing. The complexity of Rose and Elliot's relationship is shown through Rose's guilt about not telling Elliot that she knows of Paul's lover Man Yee: "I couldn't bear the thought of beginning our life on such a blatant untruth... I was slowly and surely destroying our love. Or was it simply the unravelling of our bond, a bond founded at best on a precarious kind of intimacy" (225). Rose's reluctance to disclose the existence of a "concubine" in her Chinese marriage is an embodiment of her exclusionary Sino-centric cultural ideology. My contention is that Elliot is likely to recruit Man Yee as a reason to push for Rose's divorce, which is deemed by Rose an illustration of his American liberal individualistic education. In other words, Rose has a pre-conceived notion that Elliot is unable to have a grounded grasp of her situation as a woman in Hong Kong. Hence Rose's reluctance here returns to the motif that Xu Xi deliberately refuses a *Suzie Wong*-esque narrative through her writing. Xu Xi's ultimate purpose, I think, is for Rose to attain her full sense of self, one that is unimpeded by any male characters or influence. This point is in line with Rose's reflection of the seashell

mentioned above. As Rose herself wittily says, “even now, when I [am] in such a confessional mood, I [know] I still [hold] back. Elliot would go crazy over this aspect of me. I couldn’t help it; it [is] just the way I [am]” (231). In a positive light, Rose’s reconceptualization of her Chineseness, therefore, implies a prioritization of her own self, in a rather unapologetic manner.

Based on the above discussion, we can argue that Rose’s inquiry into a re-conceptualization of her Chineseness boils down to a large extent to the way she deals with Elliot. As the narration moves on, it can be argued that the writing presents a variety of degrees of power dynamics between Rose and Elliot. At one point, we catch Rose “promis[ing]” Elliot that she “would sort things out with Paul and leave him by Christmas” (247). On another occasion, Rose reverses her own words by saying “[t]he funny thing about being Elliot’s lover [is] that it [is] inextricably tied to my being Paul’s wife” (250). What these two situations both have in common is an acknowledgment of Rose’s power over Elliot. Despite my preceding analysis of Rose’s self-centeredness, Rose’s strife for independence is not to be diminished at the same time. In most instances, Elliot, as a successful American businessman, still enjoys privilege in his social life. As Paul and Rose settle on an agreement where they decide to leave each other alone, the focus is increasingly placed on the thread of Rose’s changing notion of selfhood and womanhood. In this regard, the novel seems to be deliberately failing to justify the moral legitimacy of Rose and Elliot’s relationship. This in a way supports the preceding analysis of Xu’s intention to keep Rose’s self-making project unimpeded by male characters. In other words, by highlighting the private nature of their relationship, Xu Xi is pushing for an articulation of selfhood that is solely based on Rose’s self-realization. More specifically, in viewing Elliot’s love as a counterforce to Rose’s marriage with Paul, Rose’s individual agency is arguably framed as an opposition to any articulation of Chineseness. The writing then intends to strip off Rose’s

protective shell made out of Elliot's affection by endorsing it with a negative connotation of losing out of touch with herself as an ethnically Indonesian Chinese. That is, her search for alternative ways of living should subsequently derive from an honest inspection of her desire and needs in terms of living as an ethnic Chinese woman in Hong Kong.

In my opinion, from an enlarged perspective, Xu Xi is trying to portrait a general picture of Chinese women's life in Hong Kong. They are often imposed with the obligations of wifehood and motherhood by the patriarchal system. A recollection of the second generation women's living environment in Wong's *Portraits* would suffice to substantiate my point here. By virtue of this, Rose's uncertainty about her future with Elliot fits the novel's central theme, which is Rose's journey of re-conceptualizing selfhood and womanhood. In this regard, the revelation of Elliot's messy personal history has another significance. We are told that Elliot is legally undivorced with the wife that he has been long separate from; he also has a daughter to whom he is uncertain how to be a father; even worse, he still remains romantic connections with his wife's sister. These are all factors that threaten to loop Rose back into unequal gender relations in which Rose basically plays the role of the "concubine" if she were to divorce Paul and become a couple with Elliot officially. They also serve as a metaphor for the omnipresence and omnipotence of patriarchal gender norms on a global scale. Rose remarks:

[C]onfronting Elliot's past wasn't easy. He seemed less energetic, less romantic, less the special lover who seduced me over wine and roses. His life was messy; his family chaotic and troubled despite the insistence on familial bliss. The chaos of my family life, led as privately as possible, suddenly appeared to me saner than what Elliot went through. If nothing else, my parents had been responsible as parents, just as I had been socially responsible to Paul as his wife. From where I

came, that counted for something. (244)

In this instance, Rose appeals to the qualities associated with a functional family, which both she and Elliot fail to attain. The existence of a universal ideal of family seems to be present within her critique. The last sentence nevertheless contradicts such a tendency by contextualizing the moral dilemma in Rose's marriage. However, it is to be noted that Rose is by no means denigrating Elliot's life choices. Instead, through her comparison between the situations of her family and Elliot's, Rose is refusing to attain finality in resorting to either one of these two modalities: traditionalist Chinese or liberal American. Regarding Elliot in particular, Elliot's affection for Rose is arguably accompanied by his moral superiority over Rose. What the passage shows is a dose of Rose's unrelenting spirit against any domineering or overwhelming exterior interventions, which is a crucial aspect of her ethnic Sinophonicity.

With Paul drifting away from Rose's life, Elliot's sole dominance in her romantic pursuits provokes Rose to question the nature of everything with regards to her gender identity: "Could I really be a good mother? I didn't even know what it meant to be a wife, and especially not Elliot's wife" (239). Or in another instance, as Rose resolutely speaks, "the only thing I [know] with absolute clarity [is] that I still [don't] understand very much about myself at all" (255). Rose's bewilderment is later added more by her new discovery of Elliot's American side with their time in New York: "I realized how little I thought of the American side of Elliot, so used was I to seeing him in Asia... This wasn't the Elliot I knew in Hong Kong, restrained and overly formal for the most part, and almost shy in his politeness" (262-3). Elliot's Americanness, whatever meaning it might represent, is in contrast with Rose's Hong Kong cultural sensibility here. The text thus reminds us that Rose's bond with her Chinese roots should never be lost. The alternative ways that she is seeking should be embedded within the social reality of Hong Kong.

Accordingly, true transformations only come from within Rose, given how entrenched Hong Kong women's collective gender consciousness is in normative Chinese familialism. As the story nears to the end, my analysis returns to Rose's grappling with her ethnic Chinese family, but this time with a more sophisticated understanding from her.

4.6 Chinese Familialism Revisited

The analysis of this section focuses on Rose's emotional affiliations with her father and her mother-in-law Marion. Arguably, the family is the earliest and most effective site where normative gender socialization occurs, and where the need to perform Han Chineseness is first inculcated. In Rose's case, her relationship with her father James can be viewed as a typical case of the Electra complex. How she justifies her arrangement with Paul—that they will leave each other alone—to James dictates the extent to which she exercises her ethnic Sinophonicity, as her deference to James largely informs her gender conduct, as mentioned earlier. James embodies the dominant gender and cultural ideology in colonial Hong Kong in the early 1970s. It is a mixture of Chinese patriarchy with the colonial discourse of liberal individualism. This dynamic between Rose and her father functions in such a way that as long as Rose does not challenge her father's authority, he will be supportive of her life choices. Even when Rose decides to move away to Kuala Lumpur for a while after Paul's false accusation of her affair with Man Yee, he gives his permission:

“So why are you going, Rose?” He knew exactly why I'd come. My uncertainty was not evident to anyone except him.

...

“...No work is that important as to separate a wife from her husband.”

...

“You don’t need Paul anymore, do you?”

“No.” My reply was automatic.

“That’s too bad.”

There was an even longer silence...

“Maybe,” he began slowly, “it’s a good thing you have an education. After all,

I won’t always be here to look after you.” (234-5)

What is implicit in this instance is Rose’s intention to seek her father’s approval of her decision.

I should add that before this conversation, Rose has revealed Paul’s homosexuality to her parents.

Rose’s decision to move away is therefore morally justified. However, James’s approval is

accompanied by his reticence of Paul’s sexuality. James, like Paul’s parents, supports the

maintenance of Rose’s marriage to Paul, regardless of its lack of actual intimacy. James’s

attitude toward Rose’s marriage can be substantiated by a scene that happens later in the novel.

When Rose tells Paul her intention to have a divorce with him, Paul, in an attempt to deter this

decision, plays his trump card: “‘What about your family Rose? Your father?’ I didn’t reply.

Paul knew he had pushed the right button and turned smugly away” (267). As Xu Xi probes deep

into Rose’s psyche, her emotional identification with traditional Chinese values gradually

translates as her adherence to her father’s idea of family, which prescribes her performances of

the normative values of Chineseness. Such an idea connotes a prioritization of propriety and

“face” over individual happiness. In this regard, in order for Rose to truly reach a positive

conceptualization of ethnic Sinophonicity, it is necessary for her to break away from her

psychological enslavement to her father.

Nonetheless, Rose struggles to settle on a new, definitive conception of her ethnic

Sinophonicity in the novel attests to the difficulty for Rose to pursue a radical change of her

relationship with James. Therefore, in the last thirty pages of the novel, what we read is a state of stagnation in Rose's entanglements with Paul and Elliot. As much as Rose needs to adjust her attitude towards her father, the writing shows that their emotional ties can never be severed. If we contrast Rose with Regina, it can be seen that part of Rose's ethnic Chineseness is founded on Rose's role as James's pious daughter. As such, Xu Xi approaches Rose's change of perspectives regarding her role in the family through Regina. During the final thirty pages of the novel, we are told that Regina attempts suicide again. The fact that Regina is being taken care of by a friend rather than her family members in the States triggers Rose's reflection of the meaning of family: "What good, I wondered, was Regina's family? None of us had the courage Stan had in dealing with her. We swept her under the rug of distance" (301). In Rose's opinion, the tactic of wishful amnesia deployed by her parents is detrimental to Regina's existence. Similar to Paul's parents, such a tactic is emblematic of their inconsistent performance of normative Chineseness in their everyday lives. Rose's decision to go nurse Regina back to health then is a way Rose negotiates her relationship with her father. By assuming the responsibility of caring for her mentally unstable sister, Rose differentiates from her father for being more willingly to accept difference, alterity, or otherness even if they threaten her authority of power. Rose thus becomes an intermediary between her parents and her sister. Even though she still has much respect for her father, her behavior is, in effect, a subtle critique of their tactic of wishful amnesia.

Apart from Regina, Rose's relationship with Marion also provides an opportunity for Rose to reconsider her bond with her father. On one occasion in the text, Rose's affair with Elliot is exposed to Marion when Leanna, Elliot's intermittent lover, chances upon them. The sense of shame and fear conveyed through Rose's reaction is telling of her bond with Marion. Rose's affection for Marion is depicted in a way similar to her worship of her father. However, the bond

is soon dissolved with Paul Sr.'s revelation of Marion's past romance with his brother: "He had broken the hold Marion had on me by his revelation" (290). More importantly, the incident leads to Rose's critical examination of being ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong.

Things weren't always a question of choice. It's how my own father and [Paul Sr.] had lived their lives, and they saw no reason why anyone would want to behave otherwise. It was partly to do with being Chinese, behaving like a "gentleman" as prescribed by Confucius. My womanhood didn't count, couldn't count, not if I didn't want to upset the social order into which I was born... There were no great moral dilemmas or ethical principles in the Western sense that could guide my actions, or the actions of those closest to me. My greatest "wrong" was wanting to be a part of this Hong Kong Chinese social order I called home... Paul Sr. was just another fallible human being. Like Mum, Dad and Marion. And Regina and Paul. And Elliot. (299)

In the first place, it is crucial to call attention to the rational tone that Rose employs in the passage. Such a tone is in contrast with the sentimentality infused in the beginning episodes of Rose's bouts of frustration and confusion regarding Paul's homosexuality. In my opinion, there is a therapeutic function to Rose's long inner monologue. By opining that the root of her problem is the oppressive gender ideology in Hong Kong, she rejects her previous sense of marginality regarding her status as an Indonesian Chinese in a society dominated by Han Chinese. The question then becomes—is she really this powerless because of her ethnic status? Before this instance, Paul has made it clear that the decision lies in Rose's hands, on whether they will have a divorce or not. As such, Xu Xi subverts the stereotypical view that women are incapable of change their living realities under the patriarchal social order of the city. For Rose's clear grasp

of the gender norms could be used to her advantage. If she is to keep up the façade of her marriage with Paul, their marriage is then being acted out with a parodic intent with her renewed sense of self. In other words, she would be performing a caricature of the heterosexual marriage pact to the local elite Chinese community, if we set aside her affair with Elliot.

Furthermore, by calling the other characters “fallible” in the instance, Rose pinpoints the un-Chinese aspect in each of their expressions of ethnic Sinophonicity. If the so-called fallacy takes on such a regular frequency, would that mean there indeed exists no dichotomy between a center and its peripheries? This point arguably dispels her previous notion of “home,” in which her sense of belonging is defined by her complicity with traditional Chinese values. The seemingly remorseful passage quoted above thus can be understood as Xu Xi’s effort to raise political awareness among women of inequality in Hong Kong, particularly operating at the intersection of gender and ethnicity. By pointing out the incompatibility between her expression of ethnic Chineseness and the dominant norms, Rose gives directives as to where a radical break can generate emancipate women. Nevertheless, as the text shows, Rose’s critique does not yield any radical action on her part at the end, bearing only a renewed understanding of the living modalities that James and Marion display.

Rose’s renewed understanding should be viewed as a positive improvement in her conception of selfhood. As she says following her critique made above, “[s]omething changed inside me that night... it was about me, and who I was. And that was something I knew deeply, completely, which no person or event could ever take away” (299). For the first time in the narration, Rose claims, in an emphatic tone, the legitimacy of her brand of ethnic Chineseness as part of the social reality in Hong Kong. Such a statement also foresees her break-up with Elliot. The decision to break off her affair with Elliot results from her realization that she has been

taking enough advantage of his affection to compensate for what is lost in her marriage. However, despite such a positive change of perspectives about her own self-worth, Rose ultimately decides to keep up the façade of her marriage with Paul, even with their parents' full knowledge of the truth. Rose still respects her father and is thus willing to sacrifice her marriage rights for the sake of preserving her family's "face." To outsiders, Rose is still performing the supporting role of Paul's wife. As such, her determination to strive to attain her nuanced ways of living is still an articulation of her compromised Sinophonicity.

In conclusion, my analysis of Rose's character development has shown that her articulation of selfhood is considered a form of compromised Sinophonicity. Under the context of 1970s Hong Kong, Rose's status as a woman receives unequal treatment in her family relations both before and after her marriage to Paul. The injustice that she faces is shown in the text as a result of her anxiety of not belonging to the local elite Chinese community. Her sense of peripheral Chineseness then propels her to comply with its dominant cultural values. Nevertheless, there is also a narrative thread in the text that traces the positive change of Rose's perspectives from subjecting herself to patriarchal norms to displaying an assertive attitude that projects her conception of selfhood. Rose's story is then illustrative of the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender operating as the Chinese familialism in Hong Kong. Her articulation of her compromised Sinophonicity is thus manifested through her struggles and strife for a re-conceptualization of her ethnic Chineseness, which amount to an act of decolonization. This point is further illuminated in the next section where the analysis focuses on a bi-racial woman character—Gail Szeto—from Xu Xi's *The Unwalled City*. As my discussion will show, Gail's Eurasian physical attributes bring to the fore the inherent Sino-centrism within the seemingly cosmopolitan pre-Handover city of Hong Kong. At the same time, the ways she navigates her

predicaments also shed light on the resilience and potential that women have in the face of injustice and discrimination.

5. The Tale of Gail— The Precarity of a Hong Kong Eurasian

At the beginning of my analysis in this chapter, I have mentioned the rising tide of the women's movement in 1990s Hong Kong where *The Unwalled City* is set. As more women's groups have been politically engaged through grassroots movements, women in 1990s Hong Kong were fighting more fiercely to attain their equal rights and for their participation in handling societal issues. Under such circumstances, it can be argued that Rose's marriage predicament in the 1970s is less likely to be repeated upon women of more recent times, although issues regarding homosexuality and women's domestic role are still strongly contested. Moreover, the question of intra-ethnic relations discussed in Rose's story was not addressed in public discourse so much as the relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China in the face of the 1997 Handover. This section examines Xu Xi's characterization of Gail Szeto in *The Unwalled City*, who is half Chinese and half white, in the hopes of highlighting the hidden aspect of ethnic relations within 1990s Hong Kong. As my analysis will show, her ethnic Sinophonicity is shown through a subject position in which she insists on her "Chinese" identity despite her mixed-race background. This leads to her perpetual sense of precarity over the legitimacy of her ethnic identification with the local Sinitic community in which the discourse of a collective cosmopolitan local identity prevails. As such, Gail's story provides a forum upon which Hong Kong's relationship with colonialism is directly confronted. More importantly, I contend Gail's story provides an enlarged perspective on Hong Kong's self-positioning in the post-Handover years vis-à-vis mainland China and development of global capitalism.

Specifically, Xu Xi once wrote that Rose's story "did not inspire me the way feminist

courage did, and there were days I longed for a more powerful voice to emerge from my work” (Xu, “Writing” 423). From this consideration, the characterization of Gail is arguably the answer to Xu’s literary aspiration. For such a character, it is very difficult to imagine that she would suffer the same type of oppression as Rose has. The subtlety of discrimination that Gail encounters then reveals a new aspect of the unaddressed issues regarding decolonization. In Andanna’s story, my discussion has centered the issue of language to unravel the confusion and paradoxes experienced by Hong Kong Chinese about the Handover. By contrast, the narrative of Gail’s story constructs an outward projection of prevailing myths of the local onto an ethnic body, whose racial characteristics mark her as the role of an outsider. As Sheldon H. Lu helpfully notes, the popular “teleological reading and representation of Chinese/Hong Kong history as a series of losses and recoveries eclipses the private drama of individuals in their daily existence and the formation and deformation of their identity and subjectivity” (Lu 108). Lu’s argument about the complex and diversified formations of individual identity in Hong Kong has been examined through Andanna’s story. What remains missing is how the process of the deformation of subjectivity can reveal another side of the story about who is ruled out once a certain notion of who counts as the local people is determined. In this way, Gail’s story can be seen as a continuation of Rose’s struggle, but within a different set of power relations. Also, through an analysis of Gail, the decolonizing project in Hong Kong acquires a new dimension in unsettling the homogeneous idea of what constitutes a local in Hong Kong, which is still the central concern in public discourse of Hong Kong today. In this regard, Gail’s story serves as an appropriate ending point to this chapter’s discussion of ethnic Sinophonicity.

From the beginning of the narration, Gail’s social parameter is described as confined between her home and workplace. The rigidity of her life routine suggests her strong work ethic,

which, coupled with her Harvard-educated background, justifies her privileged life with an apartment which “ha[s] a view and a lot of space” and a “live-in domestic” in the central area of the city (Xu, *The Unwalled City* 30-1). Underlying this façade of comfort and success is her crippling fear of being excluded from the local community. Growing up Eurasian, Gail has been constantly subjected to racial discrimination. As she observes, she is often perceived as the “miscellaneous, assorted species. Not the species as defined by the respectable, family-obsessed Hong Kong *yan*, the ‘real Chinese,’ the only ‘humans’ who [count]” (104). The racism implicit in such perceptions of Gail is revealing of the hypocrisy of the elite class in colonial Hong Kong. Gail’s situation to some extent echoes Rose’s dilemma where she needs to keep up the appearance of her marriage in order to be accepted by the local Chinese community. What we see here then is the prevalence and endurance of such a racist mentality in Hong Kong society. Such a notion of racism stems of a misconceived idea of Chineseness, one that uses the category of race as its sole marker, as both Ien Ang and Rey Chow remark. Nevertheless, how can the ethnic Hong Kong Chinese have discriminatory views, when they are simultaneously colluding with the other (white Euro-American) race to set up the colonial order as we know it today? In a broader context, isn’t Hong Kong’s struggle for a local identity even during the pre-handover years evidence for a deviated form of the old doctrines of Chineseness? Consequently, we can argue that it is these layers of hypocrisy—of discriminating the non-Chinese while pursuing a cultural identity that differentiates from the Sino-centric one proposed in mainland cultural discourse—that limit our conception of ethnic Sinophonicity in Hong Kong.

More importantly, such hypocrisy is especially detrimental to the women of society. Compared to Rose’s meekness and Andanna’s pretended indifference, Gail’s critical awareness of the conservative cultural values of the elite class has nurtured in her a decisive and assertive

character in her career pursuit. In her own understanding, “discipline and persistence got her where she [i]s” (212). However, such a character often comes across as unattractive in her romantic dealings with men, including her ex-husband that is briefly featured in the novel. For instance, her then-husband had always tried to turn her work ethics against her, complaining “that she s[ees] life as only work and responsibilities” (221). Even her dear mother, harshly reproaches her regarding her divorce, blaming her assertive character as the reason for the divorce: “*Ngaahnggeng ngaam*. For years, she was deaf to her mother whom senility finally silenced. Always have to have your way. *Always have to be right. Sometimes Gail, you’re just out and out wrong*” (223). The Cantonese term used here, literally denoting “strong-man female,” points to a more general phenomenon in which women with a tough character are negatively conceived as un-feminine, and thus unappealing to men. Such a phrase is an act of discrimination against women disguised as a complimentary word at the surface. The criticism made by Gail’s mother reveals the lasting influence of the entrenched masculinist Chinese familialism in Hong Kong. However, by rendering the Cantonese phrase in English, its derogatory meaning is somewhat lost. The explanation in italics in the quote, “*you’re just out and out wrong*,” delivers a reprimanding tone of less severity. This stylistic choice of using Cantonese transliteration thus paves the way for Gail’s insistence on her alternate expression of Chineseness, or rather her ethnic Sinophonicity, as a middle-aged, divorced, and mixed-race Hong Kong woman.

One turning point for Gail’s conception of her identity is her experience of watching the opera “Marco Polo” by Tan Dun. Prior to this, Gail has been perturbed by her unrequited romantic feelings for an American photographer named Vince. Gail, and by extension Xu Xi, have again linked her failure to her idea of womanhood which goes against normative perceptions: “She said she’d never give in like other women who expected a ‘mommy track’ to

yield the same amount of power as the traditional, expected climb” (150). If we are to recall Rose’s situation, womanhood in Hong Kong is largely regulated by traditional Chinese values. Even though time has advanced since Rose’s time, and Gail has made a home in Hong Kong with a boy from her former marriage, the difficulty that Gail has experienced in dating betrays the same old story of tilted male-female gender relations. The problem with such a gender relation is that it is often regarded as non-existent in public discourse, given the reality that Hong Kong women are enjoying equal opportunities in other fields such as education, work, healthcare, and so forth. But nonetheless, in both Andanna’s and Gail’s experiences, their perception of gender has been continuously subjected to the scrutiny of male gazes in public. Gail’s excellent performance in her career, which fares much better than her male counterparts at times, is therefore considered out of place in society. In this light, the lines in the opera understandably strike a chord in Gail: “Kublai Khan sang about waiting in a city *which is not my city/ where I am a stranger also/ in this city, in this place... Make your escape to where you always were*” (258). Khan had used military forces to enter the vast territories owned by Han Chinese. The unwalling of these territories nevertheless failed to lessen his sense of exclusion by the local Han Chinese community.

Shown in the pre-handover era, the performance echoes the prevalent anxiety shared by citizens of Hong Kong. As Amy Lai correctly notes, “like Mongols who thrive in the wilderness, Hong Kong’s social and psychological landscape has long perpetuated a strong sense of alienation in its people from their ‘motherland’” (Lai 115). For Gail, the tune performed in the opera is reminiscent of her childhood dream in which “she live[s] outside the Great Wall, where she would knock and knock at the door to the Wall, but no one would ever let her in” (Xu, *The Unwalled City* 104). Following the line of thinking in the opera, what is left to subsequently do is

only to escape. As we have seen, in the days close to the handover, the number of the migrating population had surged in Hong Kong. However, what is ironic is that by fleeing from Hong Kong, one arguably loses his/her sense of belonging while living in a foreign land. The question then becomes: which one is really worse, rehabilitating yourself in a foreign land, or staying in Hong Kong as a Special Administrative Region of PRC? As Gail's story suggests, instead of letting the angst of the Handover overwhelm oneself, it is crucial to cultivate a critical mind about the forces at work in shaping one's subjectivity within one's living environment. In this way, one can attain a resilient outlook in life, such as Gail's insistence on claiming herself to be "Chinese" despite the prevalence of Sino-centrism embedded within public perceptions. Such an outlook will help to navigate confusions that engendered by a broader scale of political change in society.

This tension between fleeing and staying in Hong Kong provides a room for Gail to unsettle the idea of the local. As she reflects upon her decision to come back to Hong Kong after her graduation at the end of the performance, "it [i]sn't escape if it was where you belonged" (259). She remarks that life in Hong Kong is more about the politics of home-making in her native soil. Underlying this remark is her acknowledgment of her bicultural roots, thereby removing the grudges she had kept from being excluded by the local community. Additionally, her remark that the opera "transform[s]" (260) her can be seen as Xu Xi's intention to highlight the function of art, including literature, to illuminate the possible ways in which we can conceive our living reality. To this end, similar to the enlightening effect of the opera on Gail, this novel has arguably been consistently advocating for voices of alterity to represent women's lives in Hong Kong. It reminds us to be careful of the homogenizing tendency contained within our existing perception of Hong Kong's local identity. It also takes us beyond the 1997 handover

timeline to examine the possibilities and limits of Hong Kong's vernacular cultural production, which is, I contend, one variety of global Sinophone cultural production. The importance of the concept of Sinophonicity can be further inferred in the title of the novel, *The Unwalled City*. As Hong Kong is transitioning from one political identity to another one in the post-1997 era, it is crucial to stay open to its transnational flow of resources, such as competing cultural ideologies. This is something that Gail somehow fails to achieve. Even though she is able to discern the structural discrimination against ethnic minority women, she never seeks to overthrow it by any means. In her urgent desire to be included in the local community, she never dares to make such a move. As such, devoid of radical agency, her articulation of Sinophonicity is understood as a precarious one, which arguably springs from a reactionary, self-enclosed, defensive attitude.

Gail's precarious Sinophonicity can be observed in one instance where her performance at work is linked to her bi-racial background. In her workplace where the staff is populated by local Chinese, Gail's working principles sometimes clash with the others'. As much as she strives for a relaxing and less formal environment, she notices the employees always "[keep] up that local formality, creating rules of behavior she had never imposed" (54). Such an observation betrays the conservative side of Hong Kong's local cultural values. As Helen Siu shrewdly puts, Hong Kong people's "functional links to trade and the world assembly line have given them the false impression that they are global and modern" (Siu 136). Siu's provocative view boldly attacks the rhetoric of "east-meets-west" that is much heralded in Hong Kong. This echoes my main argument that the dominant cultural values in Hong Kong are a discursive construct out of the masculinist, ethnocentric Chinese traditional value system. To return to Gale, under her totalizing gaze, her staff's over-formality is deemed mostly negligible, as is illustrated by her view on the building where she works: "Up here on 48, the mess below was contained,

reassuring her that her home city was still beautiful” (Xu, *The Unwalled City* 51). What she fails to realize is that, just like them, she also refuses to change to a large extent as well. Hence, when she overhears what her employees think of her, she feels that her authority being threatened:

“That Szeto bitch makes me want to throw up.”

...

“It’s that ‘A-merican’ experience of hers. She’s not Chinese anymore.”

...

Her first reaction, how dare they, and then she began to cry, weeping uncontrollably... That crack about American experience. Did they still see her as one of “them” and not “us”? (284-5)

It is the alienation from the Chinese community in her childhood that has eventually driven her away to the U.S. where she acculturates herself successful with Western cultures. The experience has arguably helped to transform her into an independent and capable woman, allowing her to claim legitimacy as part of the local community of the city. Ironically, the very formula to her success now is being questioned, criticized and even weaponized to attack her. This is not by any means suggesting that Gale should conform to the conservative values for the sake of belonging to the city. Instead, Gail’s trauma is a cautionary tale that calls for the delegitimization of the “us-other” dichotomy, as represented between herself and her staff. This position calls for a horizontal view of the differentiated expressions of ethnic Sinophonicity in the city. To hold such a view is to initiate a transcultural perspective not only at the state level but also at the individual level with regard to the conception of identity. Consequently, I argue that Gail’s confidence in her alternative lifeway as a bi-racial single mother is the key to increasing the visibility of other diverse lifeways of women today confronting the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender.

Instead of panicking over which group to belong to, Gail can reach out to and ally with other ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. To have a grounded understanding of their experience will likely inspire her to find a better way to cope with her own reality.

At the very end of Gail's story, she laments how her son grows too fast. As she remarks, "one day, he wouldn't even need his mother" (290). If we stick to the "loss-and-recovery" narrative discussed by Sheldon Lu at the beginning of this section, the inevitable departure of Gail's son arguably signifies a shared sentiment shared among the local people in the face of the 1997 Handover. Nevertheless, I think the melancholy expressed in Gail's words can be interpreted as Xu Xi's reminder about the constantly evolving process of one's subject formation. That is, the precarious state of mind that Gail feels about the prospect of her son's leaving can, alternatively, provide a chance for Gale to re-negotiate her notions of selfhood and womanhood for the better. Such negotiation will surely occur multiple times during her lifetime, in a fashion similar to that Hong Kong's return to the sovereign of China is not simply a one-time political event. As recent history has shown, Hong Kong's colonial heritage, and its vernacular articulation of Sinophonicity, can easily become the source of conflict and dispute. Gail's epiphany from her experience with the play "Marco Polo" thus lends insight to our perception of Hong Kong's situation in the post-Handover years. The guiding principle here is to "*make your escape to where you always were,*" where to "escape" denotes an act of tracing back the historical formation of Hong Kong's identity (285). This act of tracing back is in effect a process of decolonization of prevailing modes of knowledge on what constitutes the local in Hong Kong. With a grounded knowledge of the city's past, and simultaneously an open attitude towards change, the city is never going to be obliterated of its cultural distinction but remains home for millions of people of different ethnic and gender backgrounds.

6. Conclusion: The Becoming of Female Ethnic Sinophonicity

This chapter has aimed to attain an understanding of ethnic Sinophonicity through a consideration of how the troubles experienced by Xu Xi's literary characters due to their ethnic identities are put into language. In analyzing the life-stories of the three women from Xu Xi's *Hong Kong Rose* and *The Unwalled City*, I have shown how the ethnic subjectivities of these women are co-opted by the dominant discursive construct of Chineseness. The framework of ethnic Sinophonicity is to disrupt, as well as expand, popular perceptions of Hong Kong's cultural identity, specifically vis-à-vis the 1997-Handover timeline. As Howard Chiang helpfully notes, to call Hong Kong a Sinophone modernity is "to distinguish itself from and gradually replace an older apparatus of colonial modernity" (Chiang 549-550). Chiang's words reiterate my argument in the introductory chapter about the distinction between two temporalities, one based on political dates and the other based on the psycho-cultural transformations of the local people of Hong Kong. The psycho-cultural line of temporality specifically finds an embodied resonance in the two texts discussed above. As the characters' ethnic bodies are perceived only by the commonsensical notion of race categories, they are barred from having a secure sense of belonging in the local community. This insecurity is expressed through tropes of failed marriages, troubled inter-ethnic love romances and language conundrums. Although these tropes are common themes in English-language writings about Hong Kong, Xu Xi's construction nevertheless places them under the rubric of intra-ethnic conflicts. In such a way, her writings overthrow prevailing notions of Han Chineseness within Hong Kong society. As a result, they extend the existing epistemological reach of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture. Ethnic Sinophonicity thus proves how English language can be an effective instrument to articulate the transcultural space of Hong Kong.

Calling for a transcultural perspective in no way ignores the historical particularities of the city. On the contrary, the transcultural formation of Hong Kong's modernity stems from its particular geopolitical and socio-cultural conditions. To this end, my analysis has first showcased the varying degrees of effects of Chinese familialism on the three female characters. In doing so, the analysis highlights the possible ways women can navigate their predicaments vis-à-vis the broader societal conditions in which they are situated. The transcultural perspective is then brought about in a comparative lens through, to borrow Aihwa Ong's term, an "inter-referencing" practice between the different living realities confronting the three female characters. According to Ong, "inter-referencing refers more broadly to practices of citation, allusion, aspiration, comparison, and competition" (Ong 17). Although Ong is talking about urban development through inter-city referencing, her words are applicable to our discussion here. The inter-referencing practice puts the three women characters in a horizontal relationality, thus giving Hong Kong's local ethnic demographics a multi-layered representation. As the three women characters have implicitly or explicitly shown, there always exists an underlying uneasiness in their articulation of Sinophonicity. This uneasy feeling is nevertheless necessary, as "Hong Kong's self-narrative of difference... is often perceptible only as an undertow of unease that refuses to allow the surface calm to settle" (H. Leung 5). The ultimate purpose of this argument, I contend, is to unsettle any normative ideals of Chineseness in official discourse of Hong Kong as synonymous with traditional Han Chinese cultural values. Simultaneously, through the act of inter-referencing, we can also obtain a vertical relationality between ethnic Chinese women in Hong Kong from different class backgrounds. Such vertical relations are achieved, as I have demonstrated in my analysis, through a comparison between Wong Bik-wan's portrayal of lower-class women and Xu's upper-middle-class ones. Overall, the horizontal and vertical

relations lend useful perspectives to discuss the status of women confronting the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender in post-Handover Hong Kong society.

My discussion will be concluded by a further consideration of Xu Xi's use of English to render ethnic Sinophonicity in the two novels. Xu Xi's own background as well as her characters has attested to the fallacy of the idea of linguistic nativity, as mentioned earlier. Linguistic nativity denotes that an accurate portrayal of Hong Kong's local experience is associated with the use of the Cantonese language in discourses. However, the incorporation of Romanized Cantonese and Mandarin words in Xu Xi's English narratives proves the inadequacy of using a the native tongue, Cantonese, to describe the subjectivity of a local individual whose ethnicity refuses reductive categorization by the racial concept of "Chinese." Furthermore, Xu's characterization of the female subject in her novels overthrows stereotypes by other popular English-language writings about Hong Kong, such as *Suzie Wong*. In this way, Xu's use of English breaks conventions within the line of Hong Kong writing, with a renewed affectivity attached to this mother tongue of imperialistic ideology. In this fashion, the two novels show the possibility for multi-lingual representations of Hong Kong's cultural sensibility at the local level.

Additionally, writing about Hong Kong in English allows for another space of creativity and transculturation that puts the city in dialogue with other places/cities that are undergoing their own process of decolonization. In the contemporary age where political agency in Hong Kong is active and much needed, it is important to envision the city through a distinctive collective imaginary. Such an imagination, in my opinion, can draw inspiration from the alliance of inter-literary sensibilities between Chinese- and English-language writings within the city, and between different regions. Ultimately, my conception of ethnic Sinophonicity is to shed new light on the possible ways one can form that alliance to enhance the current understanding of

global Sinophone cultures.

Conclusion

Twenty years after Hong Kong's handover to the PRC in 1997, the discussion on Hong Kong's political future remains, rather unnervingly, unresolved. As more disputes between different ideological groups boil, what we witness is the rise of large-scale social activism at the grassroots level in the city. Accompanying such activism is the proliferation of cultural discourse on the city's colonial heritage. The topic of the relation between politics and culture is certainly nothing new. However, the extent to which politics and culture mutually constitute each other is arguably not yet fully unraveled. As Fredric Jameson helpfully notes, in late capitalist societies, there is "a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life... can be said to have become 'cultural' in some original and yet untheorized sense" (Jameson 48). In view of Jameson's words, a study of the culture of the capitalist society of Hong Kong can be seen as an investigation into the complex, rich tapestry of social dynamics in its everyday life. This understanding of culture offers, I argue, a potential entry point through which perceptions of existing social relations can be changed on a personal level. Such a change of perception is itself political, leading to the forming of future political agendas as well. To this end, this dissertation has argued for the value of literary fiction, through its telling of individual lived experience, in providing decolonizing discourses to the studies of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture. This is achieved by a conceptualization of the notion of Sinophonicity through a consideration of three key aspects that articulate the relationship between Hong Kong's colonial formation and its literature—namely, history, gender, and ethnicity.

Specifically, Sinophonicity in this thesis refers to the formation of the local subject born of a site of power, involving multiple processes of negotiation between different cultural value

systems operating within Hong Kong's Sinophone space. The primary mission of conceptualizing such a term is to counter a prevailing myth about Hong Kong's identity that often reduces it into an after-effect of the political binary between China and the West. More precisely, such a myth prioritizes either the Chinese nationalistic or colonial affiliation of the city in shaping a collective identity of the local people. Therefore, the distinctive social forms of the city are easily overlooked under the problematic rubrics of "China," the "West," and "Hong Kong." Although many studies have drawn attention to this point, my conception of Sinophonicity in this thesis contributes to the current paradigmatic discussion of Hong Kong's identity in two regards. In the first place, this thesis uses Sinophonicity to denote subject formations in Sinitic cultural communities that include the Han community in mainland China. Such a definition draws attention to the polyphonic, multivocal and non-oppressive cultural forms produced in the Han communities on the mainland. In this way, Sinophonicity as a framework dismantles any hierarchical structuration that essentializes "China" and "Hong Kong" in strictly vertical relations. Instead, it deems Hong Kong as a site of production where cultural values circulate in a trans-regional movement of back-and-forth. As a result, both "Hong Kong" and "China" are dissolved in a multi-layered constellation of cultural exchanges and interactions.

In the second place, while accentuating a horizontal view of the Sinitic cultural productions between different regions, my conception of Sinophonicity still pays close attention to the particularities of each region. Sinophonicity as a cultural lens is sensitive to the intra- and inter-dynamism between different cultural practice operating within and without a locale. The historical particularities of each locale are not lost but embodied, I contend, in the formal attributes of the cultural productions that produce specific meanings of Sinophonicity. In this regard, the manner in which a cultural work carries its content is deemed an indispensable part of

the meaning of that cultural work. As this thesis has shown, it is in dissecting the formal attributes of the literary fiction that the notion of Sinophonicity helps to uncover in specific terms how a character's subject position is shaped by, and also responds to, historical contingencies, including gender, class, language, ethnicity, race, age and so on. On this note, Sinophonicity serves as an effective tool in pinpointing the diversified, complex identity formation operating within Hong Kong society. Overall, the two aspects of Sinophonicity stated above make it a useful discursive basis upon which this dissertation proceeds with the project of decolonizing Hong Kong.

In contemplating how literature may produce decolonizing impetus, this dissertation has considered three aspects as most pertinent to our thinking about a collective sense of local identity: namely history, gender and ethnicity. These three aspects are, I argue, closely tied to the question of Hong Kong's cultural heritage, which is the central focus of any decolonizing act. An analysis of these three aspects in this thesis gives insights into both the macro and micro scales of power dynamics involved in the formation of the subject position of the everyday person. First of all, public discourse on Hong Kong's local identity has arguably rested largely on debates concerning the city's history. Hence, an investigation into the historicity of the identity formation of the local people during different times is necessary to resist the dominance of any single master narrative on our historical consciousness. Secondly, most historical narratives are written from a singular gender perspective, which manifests itself in the hegemonic norms of state-sanctioned patriarchy. In this regard, an examination of the diverse expressions of womanhood and manhood sheds new light on the complex social relations in Hong Kong. Thirdly, any inquiry into Hong Kong's colonial heritage cannot escape the much-exalted cultural discourse on hybridity. However, much of the public discourse on Hong Kong's hybrid local identity takes as

a given the Han Chinese “race” of the people. An analysis of Sinophonicity along the axis of ethnicity thus exposes the inadequacy of using racial categories to capture the collective experience of local people of different ethnic backgrounds.

For each of these three aspects, a local writer was selected whose works, as the chapters in this thesis have shown, best exemplified my arguments made in the last paragraph. In structuring this dissertation around the aspects of history, gender, and ethnicity, the notion of Sinophonicity stemmed from the textual analysis also reveals the intersectionality of these aspects and the factors of capitalism, class, and language. As such, the literary works selected here collectively present a diachronic, as well as synchronic view of the complex formation of Hong Kong’s Sinophone culture.

Chapter one sets out to examine the construction of historical Sinophonicity in Dung Kai-cheung’s *Works and Creation: Vivid and Lifelike* (2005). The chapter shows how Dung’s writing of personal narratives challenges the prevailing models of how history is written in official discourse. Specifically, in dissecting Dung’s strategy of replacing macro-history with personalized stories, my analysis pays specific attention to two aspects of historical Sinophonicity. First of all, the linear temporal disposition embedded in Hong Kong’s grand historical narratives is disrupted by Dung’s textual representation of the narrator’s family history. The family history is presented as a series of disjointed personal narratives put together under thirteen titles, each referring to the name of a modern artifact. In this manner, linear time is fractured into spatial orders. More importantly, by telling individualized experiences with each artifact, these artifacts are invested with various personal meanings. Dung, therefore, constructs a history of Hong Kong that centers on the mutually constitutive relationship between human subjects and tangible things. This way of writing history strays far away from the dominant mode

of history writing that revolves around the axis of China-Hong Kong-the West. It provides a grounded observation of Hong Kong's social and cultural formation as processes of power struggles. Dung's work thus exemplifies how literary fiction helps to articulate a differentiated sense of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture by way of history-inflected writing. This technique and method constitutes the first meaning for the notion of historical Sinophonicity examined in this chapter.

My chapter on Dung then shifts to a second narrative strand in the novel in which a fictional world of person-objects is created by the narrator of the first narrative strand. The creation of the person-objects' world is largely aligned with the first narrative strand which gives a personalized history of tangible things. In setting up a distinction between the person-object world and the human world, I argue that this second narrative strand serves as a political allegory of Hong Kong's ongoing socio-political circumstances. Under the shadow of humans upon whom person-objects are molded, Dung here suggests that a possible way for person-objects to obtain agency is through their imagination. Imagination, and by extension literary fiction, then becomes a metaphor for a necessary alternative conceptualization of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture. Moreover, this alternative conceptualization has manifested itself in the notion of possible worlds in the later parts of the first narrative strand. Here, the notion of possible worlds acts as a central thread by which the two narrative strands are connected to forge a dialogic relationship between the past and the present. My analysis then argues that *Works* pushes for the inclusion of the dialogic relationship established between past and present in the writing of history. This viewpoint constitutes the second meaning for the notion of historical Sinophonicity examined in this chapter. Overall, insofar as the writing of history has a direct bearing on our knowledge of the city's colonial heritage, this chapter sets the tone for my overall argument

concerning the need to decolonize Hong Kong culture.

Diverging from Dung's vision above, the second chapter argues the need for a gender perspective in any historiographical account of Hong Kong by analyzing of Wong Bik-wan's *Portraits of Martyred Women* (1999) and *Children of Darkness* (2013). In writing against traditional representations of gender identity, Wong's works solidify a notion of gendered Sinophonicity that awakens us to the multiplicity of manifestations of womanhood and manhood in Hong Kong. Specifically, in *Portraits*, Wong re-enacts the term *lienü* to portray the extent of women's tenacity in the face of patriarchal oppression. *Lienü* was originally coined as a regulating mechanism for women's conduct in a traditional Chinese cultural context. Here, the term is used to emphasize the women characters' unrelenting pursuit of personal integrity when faced with patriarchal violence. In addition, stylistically, Wong employs the form of oral history in her narration to give various lower-class women a voice to express their subject positions. Her writing thus demonstrates women's resilience in surviving, enduring and resisting unequal treatment from male family members and society at large. In so doing, Wong's concept of *lienü* is at variance with women figures deemed commendable by traditional historians in classical texts. The notion of gendered Sinophonicity thus points to both Wong's writing of oral history and her enactment of *lienü* as an empowering trope instead of a shaming mechanism leading to subservient female subjects. The two tactics attest to the potential of Hong Kong as a cultural space to inspire alternative discourses on gender.

In *Children of Darkness*, my analysis continues its pursuit of the nuances embedded in the notion of gendered Sinophonicity by focusing on Wong's celebrated use of street and prison slang in her portrayal of a male drug addict. The depiction of the male gangster/druggie brings to the fore the different sites of power dynamics outside the family institution. The male gangster's

marginality is revealed to be informed largely by the kind of Cantonese vernacular he uses. The esoteric names addressed to different characters showcase conflicting ideals of manhood. In this respect, Wong undercuts the popular cinematic representation of heroic male villains, which has arguably cultivated a romanticized image of the street gangster, one that circulates among the general public. The novel thereby unmasks the structural discrimination and injustice against underprivileged people in the existing social system of Hong Kong. The notion of gendered Sinophonicity as such highlights the multiplicity of vernacular languages spoken in the city, including the different vernacular spaces existing within the Cantonese-speaking speech community. Furthermore, gendered Sinophonicity presented in this novel is also shown to expand our conventional understanding of the family as the primary site for gender codification. Both of these points of analysis articulate in a way the nuances of Hong Kong as a cultural site that generates non-conforming manifestations of gendered subjectivity.

Complementing the issues of history and gender is my discussion of the ethnic context in Hong Kong in the final chapter. Through the chapter's focus on the notion of ethnic Sinophonicity, my reading of Xu Xi's *Hong Kong Rose* (1997) and *The Unwalled City* (2001) covers important ground for the ongoing decolonization project of Hong Kong. Prevailing discourses of Hong Kong's hybrid culture have arguably relied on an unquestioned assumption that to be local is to be Chinese. Such an assumption further confuses the category of ethnicity with that of race, thus equating the Chinese race with Han ethnicity. By the term "the Chinese race," I refer to people whose ancestry can be traced to be within the geographic boundaries of the Chinese mainland, thus sharing similar physical features that differentiate them from other races such as the Caucasians. In this regard, the Chinese race includes a variety of Sinitic language-speaking ethnic groups, among which Han ethnicity is one. From this consideration,

Xu Xi's portrayal of three characters with different ethnic backgrounds—one Han Chinese, one Indonesian Chinese, and one Eurasian—in the English language adds an important aspect of discussion to the conceptualization of Hong Kong's Sinophonicity. In this sense, Hong Kong's Sinophone culture is not necessarily confined to cultural productions conducted in Sinitic languages. Rather, this chapter advocates a polyphonic view of Hong Kong's Sinophone culture that includes cultural production undertaken in Chinese, English, and other languages provided they are speaking from a local point of view. In this respect, the English language used in Xu's writing arguably veers away from the idea that English is invariably a vehicle for the distribution of imperialist and capitalist ideologies. Instead, stylistically, Xu's use of English in her novels conveys a sense of perpetual anxiety over who, ethnic Chinese or not, has the right to claim legitimacy to the city and its varied culture/s. In this regard, the notion of ethnic Sinophonicity may be seen as an extension of the tension between the Cantonese vernacular and standard written Chinese in Hong Kong literary discourse.

Apart from the sense of perpetual anxiety that it conveys, the use of English in Xu's novels also has the effect of creating a critical distance between the texts and readers who usually read about Hong Kong in Sinitic script. Such a distance results in the deconstruction of the idea of normative Chineseness. In *Hong Kong Rose*, the deconstruction effect is shown through the eponymous Rose's struggle against the imperative to maintain her Chinese family's "face" by staying within her unhappy, sexless marriage with her homosexual husband, Paul. Yet this empty marriage is already a violation of normative Chinese ideals of a harmonious family. As she explains Rose's difficult situation to readers, Xu Xi repeatedly calls up the word "Chinese" and, in the process, interrogates its meaning. In this way, *Hong Kong Rose* may be read simultaneously as an honest emotional rant and as a disquisition on the insidious effect of

Chinese familialism on women. Similarly, in *The Unwalled City*, the language used to describe the two protagonists, Andanna and Gail, is plagued with the tension between Chinese and the West, despite being situated at a more contemporary period than Rose's narrative. The notion of ethnic Sinophonicity is then concretized in moments in the text where the narration refuses to succumb to this tension and give its readers an easy resolution. The two novels, therefore, showcase how the notion of ethnic Sinophonicity is crucial in exposing and challenging the deep-seated ethnic hierarchization and discrimination practices against women and minority ethnic groups in contemporary Hong Kong society.

All in all, the three chapters listed above are strong testaments to the critical agency contained within the concept of Sinophonicity. As Hong Kong undergoes its decolonization in many cultural fields, it is my hope that such a concept provides an effective intellectual tool to facilitate that process. Meanwhile, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the concept of Sinophonicity in this thesis aims to affect the formation of future political agendas by encouraging critical examination of our perceptions of the city's past. To put this point into perspective, I refer to Shih Shu-mei's discussion of the dichotomy between "roots" and "routes" that is often cited in many scholarships on migration, globalization, and transnationalism. In the age of globalization, social activities are involuntarily absorbed into a transnational network of relations. As such, people's sense of home is not necessarily linked with their birthplace or country. From the perspective of Sinophone studies, the obsession with origin is then deemed less important than the political implications of having a fluid, mobile identity. As Shih astutely notes, "[t]o link homeness with the place of residence therefore becomes an ethical act that chooses concrete political engagement in the local" (Shih, *Visuality* 190). As a result, in the contemporary era, the initial meaning of "roots," which was associated with one's original

homeland, is replaced by a renewed signification, connoting the politics of home-making in one's place of residence.

Nevertheless, the journey involved in new home-making tends arguably to be a rough one, as it involves difficult struggles and resistance. In order to fully articulate the critical potential embedded in the renewed concept of "roots," the very movement that one takes from one place of residence to another is highlighted in Shih's argument as a notion of "routes." As Shih succinctly explains, the concept of "routes" connotes "not a theory of mobile citizens who disidentify from the local nation-state and disengage from local politics, but the politicization of that mobility" (ibid.). In this regard, the notions of "roots" and "routes" should be used together to depict the political agency of a subject who is always on the move. Put precisely, a combination of the meanings of the two concepts helps to convey a level of criticality with which a mobile subject engages in his/her mode of living against the broader context of nationalism and globalization.

My conception of Sinophonicity in this dissertation draws upon this level of criticality embedded in the terms "roots" and "routes" to argue for its potential to mobilize change at the individual level in Hong Kong. Specifically, how Hong Kong people view their relationship with mainland China in the post-handover years is similar to the journey of new home-making implied by Shih's redefinition of "roots." The end goal for this journey of new home-making is, I argue, Hong Kong's successful positioning of itself within the context of mainland Chinese nationalism and globalization. However, such a goal cannot be attained without a consideration of the possible ways of achieving it, which then brings to mind Shih's definition of "routes." My analysis of Sinophonicity in the three chapters of this dissertation has shown how Hong Kong's Sinophone space inspires alternative thinking about the city's relationship with mainland China

before the Handover. This view of Hong Kong's Sinophone space can be carried over to the present situations. Such a temporal movement attests to the connotation of "routes" discussed above. In this way, the concept of Sinophonicity can maintain its political valence for Hong Kong's future cultural struggles, as it always draws inspiration from a critical examination of the city's past.

Bearing the above discussion in mind, it would seem that, other than the issues of history, gender, and ethnicity, Sinophonicity is also applicable to a broader range of topics such as eco-criticism and migrant studies. Issues such as environmental sustainability are equally important to the studies of Hong Kong in the contemporary era. They all signify an awakening of civic-mindedness among the local residents. In other words, they represent a collective attempt among the local people to find their positioning vis-à-vis regimes of power and global capitalism. Although these themes traverse beyond the immediate bounds of decolonization, they are equally reflective of the changing social landscape of Hong Kong. This is especially true when the tension between globalization and the preservation of indigenous tradition grows increasingly intensified in the city. Such new forms of disputes are nevertheless entangled with the project of decolonizing Hong Kong, as the project suggests Hong Kong's working out of a historical relation not only with colonialism or Chinese nationalism, but also with capitalism. In this respect, what is analyzed in this dissertation can lend insight to other areas of inquiry by highlighting struggles of a similar nature. More importantly, by taking on the lens of Sinophonicity, we can learn to distinguish critical exegesis from discourses that are in the service of oppressive political ideologies.

To expand this final point, I return to the starting point of my thesis where the concept of Sinophonicity as a discursive construct was offered for literary analysis. Hong Kong's

Sinophone cultural production has usually been viewed as being confined to popular cinematic and musical production. In this regard, my notion of Sinophonicity is arguably invested with a mission to provide a counter-narrative through its focus on less popular modes of cultural production. That is not to say that popular cinematic and musical productions have exhausted the creative agency and potential of the genres. Rather, many local visual and auditory art practices have grown increasingly innovative in order to challenge problematic conventions. In this regard, the study of these productions can also be brought under the category of Sinophonicity delineated in this dissertation.

To return to the medium of literature, my argument about Sinophonicity was conducted to accentuate the critical potential of Hong Kong literature; I hope to reorganize or revamp our understanding of the city through the multi-valent concept of Sinophonicity. The three authors, Dung Kai-cheung, Wong Bik-wan and Xu Xi, have each demonstrated the manner in which fiction acts as a form of creative disruption to challenge prevailing value systems. In their experiments with form and style, the narratives produced by these writers break conventions, challenge status-quos and build an affective tie between readers and texts. The range of richness of their work point to a tradition of serious literary writing in Hong Kong. As Leung Ping-kwan once noted, “the consciousness to portray urban life appeared way earlier in literature than in movies” (Leung, *City* 16; my translation). As such, it is imperative, I argue, to always interrogate how fiction can be used to reflect and refract the particularities of Hong Kong’s Sinophone culture during different time periods. Ultimately, in a time when Hong Kong is once again experiencing a “coming of age” in terms of political and social change, cultural productions such as literary fiction deserve more critical attention. They can nurture in us a critical capacity to appreciate how we once shared a common culture, and also inspire us to work together to create

a shared future.

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