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The “Narrative State”:   
A New Methodology for   
British Expatriate Hong Kong Writing

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**Summary**

This thesis comprises a critical essay, ‘ The “Narrative State”: A New Methodology for British Expatriate Hong Kong Writing’, and a novel, *The Widening of Tolo Highway*, an experiment in decolonial life-writing. Alongside my own experiences, I draw on semi-structured interviews I conducted with Hong Kong residents in 2017 (see appendices). I consult Hong Kong English language prose, news media, contemporary art, and critical scholarship, developing a methodology for responsible English language academic and prose writing about Hong Kong.

The novel follows protagonist, Anna, who returns to Hong Kong three years after the 2014 protests to search for Kallum, a local Hong Kong student activist whom she befriended in 2014, but who was violently targeted by an anti-Occupy triads. The narrative traces in an intensely self-conscious investigation of Anna’s relationship with the city and the technical and symbolic implications of writing about Hong Kong in English. The narrative is closely focalised through Anna, who, by re-exploring and re-living memories, finds herself revising her own “narrative map”. The narrative is comprised of fragments of Anna’s reflections in 2014 and in 2017. These dual temporal instances of Anna are focalised through a third person-narrator who shares the perceptive gaze of both but is distanced enough to simultaneously watch how Anna observes her surroundings. This structure positions Anna as both observer and observed. This dual perspective constitutes my ‘dual-flâneur’ narrative methodology, named as such because I repurpose the 19th Century Baudelairean flâneur (1863), the detached male observer of modern life,[[1]](#footnote-2) as foundation for new post-colonial urban explorations. I use the flâneur figure as a ‘viewing’ device;[[2]](#footnote-3) as each temporal instance of Anna observes the Hong Kong metropolis, she is observed by a parallel presence, the third person narrator. Anna is, however, uncannily aware of being watched; as flâneur herself, she reciprocates this gaze and “watches-back”. This allows for a degree of self-reflection, between both timeframes and between the positionalities of writer, narrator and character. My re-working of the flâneur model also allows me to question gendered models of the urban explorer, and how a female flâneur might be better positioned to interrogate contemporary discursive structures in the Anglophone Hong Kong narrative space.

Chapter 1 of the critical work traces present-day legacies of Han Suyin’s depiction of identity and space in *A Many-Splendoured Thing* (1952), focalising generic narrative tropes and formulaic binaries. Chapter 2 expands on this history, comparing contemporary narrative “mappings” of Hong Kong space and society by both local and expatriate writers and the extent to which they represent Hong Kong as temporally, politically and ideologically “in-between”. I explore narrative formulae that marginalise Hong Kong and present “Hong Kong identity” as on the verge of disappearing, threatened by repatriation and globalist hegemony. Such narratives are dominated by East/West and China/Hong Kong binaries and are preoccupied with territorial notions of threat and defence. Other narratives, however, draw from Hong Kong’s marginality as a source of shared identity and depict Hong Kong as a diasporic space but one in which residents can anchor their identities in an increasingly globalised present. Chapter 3 addresses the symbolic and discursive marginalisation of the Hong Kong identity in contemporary adventure narratives, such as Booth’s *Gweilo: Memories of a Hong Kong Childhood* (2005). Responding to this text, I give an in-depth reflection on my own novel’s composition as I develop a methodology that counters the assumed “centrality” of the British narrator and writer. I conclude by proposing a post-colonially responsible narrative methodology that I, a British writer, can use to write about Hong Kong, without marginalising or speaking reductively of “Hong Kong identity”. I call this methodology the “narrative state”; a literary aesthetic that treats Hong Kong as a collection of subjective, conflicting and inherently fictional stories, including my own. This model guides me away from echoing restrictive narrative tropes and binaries that have dominated anglophone writing since 1949, and beyond a felt need to territorially ‘defend’ a Hong Kong identity or attempt to depict it ‘authentically’. Consciously reflecting on my post-colonial authorial positionality, I therefore avoid making ‘truth-telling’ claims and arrogant narrative assertions.

The “Narrative State”:

A New Methodology for British Expatriate Hong Kong Writing

**Introduction**

**Beginnings**

In 2014, I started writing about Hong Kong. That July, I had moved from England to Tai Po, in the New Territories, with a small group of friends to teach English. At the end of September, a few days before China National Day, we began to hear of a student protest in Admiralty, over on Hong Kong Island. The Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress had confirmed a decision to vet candidates for the Hong Kong elections. Our local Hong Kong co-teachers expressed anger at this decision. Preparations for the school’s scheduled China National Day celebrations fuelled a tense atmosphere. Anti-mainland sentiment magnified. I heard the same phrase repeated: ‘Hong Kong is not China’. This was the start of the 2014 Occupy, or *Umbrella Movement*, a three-month long occupation of several of Hong Kong’s key business areas with the goal of universal suffrage. The protests were punctuated with the contested use of tear-gas by the Hong Kong police and triad attacks. Despite being new to Hong Kong, we were keen to join our colleagues at the sit-in: a pledge of support and an excuse for excitement. We stayed two nights on the highway, before work commitments dragged us, not entirely reluctantly, away.

In the weeks that followed, I began to reflect creatively on pernicious anti-mainland sentiment and question the symbolism of our position as British immigrants protesting for Hong Kong’s post-handover autonomy. In fragments of prose, I also documented my affective responses to Hong Kong’s physical and social environment. I felt strangely *outside* and became creatively fascinated with liminal spaces: the bus stations, alleys, and laybys, in which I composed these pieces while commuting between private-tutoring sessions. They seemed to represent both my own “off-centeredness” and the “marginalized” Hong Kong voice I kept hearing about. Several months later, I had a visit from my mother; here, the tone of my writing pivoted. Though I had tried to immerse myself in Hong Kong culture, always conscious of cultural appropriation and ‘Orientalising’ practices I had studied,[[3]](#footnote-4) I was suddenly confronted with a mirror; in my mother’s interactions with Hong Kong and Hong Kong people, I recognised my own unconscious behaviours. I assumed a new self-consciousness as writer. I began to experiment more critically with creative ways of addressing the question: *How can I, as a British writer, write responsibly about Hong Kong?* And, moreover: *Should I write about Hong Kong at all?*

Addressing these concerns, this study is comprised of a critical essay and novel, *The Widening of Tolo Highway*, an experiment in decolonial life-writing. The novel follows protagonist, Anna, who has returned to Hong Kong three years after the 2014 protests. She has returned to search for Kallum, a local Hong Kong student activist whom she befriended in 2014, suspecting he was violently targeted by an anti-Occupy triad gang. Though she anticipates that this second exploration of Hong Kong ‘will be different… [d]eadened with purpose’,[[4]](#footnote-5) it manifests that Anna’s relationship with Hong Kong, as both traveller and writer, is much more psychologically complex than she first realised. Though the novel uses a third person narrator, the narrative is closely focalised through Anna, who, by re-exploring and re-living memories, finds herself drawn back into a ‘past … she isn’t sure she ever left’.[[5]](#footnote-6) The narrative juxtaposes Anna’s two temporal experiences, flitting between 2014 and 2017, to show both her conflicting and enduring ideas about the space along with uncannily familiarities she encounters by revisiting. The extremely close third-person narration creates a feeling that both instances of Anna are “being watched”, producing an intensely self-conscious narrative tone. This study address Anna’s relationship with the city, while exploring the technical and symbolic implications of writing about Hong Kong in English.[[6]](#footnote-7)

Alongside my own experiences, I conducted semi-structured interviews with Hong Kong residents about ‘Hong Kong identity’, both as an additional original contribution to the field, and as an extra primary source of tropes used to talk about Hong Kong.[[7]](#footnote-8) I consult Hong Kong English language prose, news media, contemporary art, and critical scholarship in postcolonial narrative,[[8]](#footnote-9) with the aim of decolonising my own academic and prose writing. This wide range of discourse illuminates just how saturated Hong Kong identity discourse is with certain tropes and formulae that my own narrative methodology aims to move away from.

While John Nguyet Erni argues that ‘[i]nevitably, writing about Hong Kong involves a triangular articulation of Chinese Nationalism, British colonialism, and globalism, which also invokes the impossibility of serving three masters’,[[9]](#footnote-10) my study seeks to steer English language Hong Kong writing out of this impasse, first considering the relationship between these master narratives, and then developing a methodology that subverts this idea of Hong Kong as subordinate to them. My literature review (Chapter 1) is original in its analysis of the present-day legacies of Han Suyin’s depiction of identity and space in *A Many-Splendoured Thing* (1952). Chapter 2 expands on this history, comparing contemporary narrative “mappings” of Hong Kong space and society, by local and expatriate writers. While inward-looking, defensive representations of Hong Kong habitually position a Hong Kong identity as on the verge of disappearing, adversely globalist, outward-looking representations can be equally marginalising. As Chapter 3 addresses, the marginalisation of Hong Kong is also paramount in contemporary adventure narratives, such as British expatriate Martin Booth’s *Gweilo: Memories of a Hong Kong Childhood* (2005), both through ‘orientalising’ tropes[[10]](#footnote-11) and latent colonial discursive hierarchies.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I give an in-depth reflection on my own novel’s composition in response to these narrative formulae. Building on existing narrative methods of “centralising” Hong Kong as a place of shared identity, I develop a methodology that counters the assumed “centrality” of the Western narrator and writer’s voice. I conclude by proposing a post-colonially responsible narrative methodology that I, a British writer, can use to write about Hong Kong, without marginalising or speaking reductively of “Hong Kong identity”. I call this methodology the “narrative state”; a literary aesthetic that treats Hong Kong as a collection of subjective, conflicting and inherently fictional stories, including my own, but which cannot therefore be threatened nor comprehensively represented by any single narrative. My “narrative state” methodology is not a prescription for a wider identity-formation for Hong Kong, but a model for a literary aesthetic. When “Hong Kong identity” is written about in such a way that foregrounds dialogical multiplicity and complexity, there is less of a felt need to ‘defend’ a singular identity, and fall back on volatile socio-political binaries, which ‘tend to confuse more than they clarify questions of identity’.[[11]](#footnote-12) My “narrative state” model guides me away from restrictive narrative tropes and binaries that have dominated anglophone writing since 1949. Furthermore, consciously reflecting on my post-colonial authorial positionality and own subjective skews, I avoid making ‘truth-telling’ claims and arrogant narrative assertions.

My “narrative state” formula builds on previous studies of ways of representing a ‘postcolonial collective’.[[12]](#footnote-13) However, rather than simply describing the multiplicity and conflictive nature of voices within a postcolonial nation-state, my methodology *uses* this idea of the multiplicity of perspective productively, to re-direct the trajectory of my narrative. My critical work uses the idea of multiple voices to:

a) [resist] all master narratives with a critique of Eurocentricism as a primary goal, (b) [resist] all the forms of spatial homogenisation and temporal teleology, and (c) … understan[d] the dialectical relationship between the colonizer and colonized.[[13]](#footnote-14)

I then move beyond what Sandra Lila Maya Rota calls the ‘impasse’ that this type of postcolonial enquiry often produces, where the ‘de-construction of the hierarchies of power’ does not extend to a ‘subsequent re-construction’.[[14]](#footnote-15) My novel embodies this reconstruction. Using a ‘decolonial framework’,’ I ‘focus on hybrid experiences, practices, and identities, as well as on the ideologies, performances, and practices that actively question, critique, and challenge colonization’.[[15]](#footnote-16) The novel then, is my research in practice, demonstrating this decolonial narrative aesthetic for writing about Hong Kong.

**A History of Diaspora**

Focus on multiplicity and hybridity is essential when considering Hong Kong’s period of rapid globalisation from the late 1940s to the present. Ackbar Abbas discusses Hong Kong’s development since then from colonial entrepot into globalised cosmopolis and economic powerhouse. He identifies the city as a ‘more complex kind of colonial space produced by the unclean breaks and unclear connections between imperialism and globalism’.[[16]](#footnote-17) Distinguishable from other colonial cities in India, Africa or South America, since, besides small settlements, ‘Hong Kong has no pre-colonial past to speak of’[[17]](#footnote-18), Hong Kong’s identity is characterised by diaspora. Stuart Hall’s canonical writing ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’ is particularly illuminating in Hong Kong’s case. Hall writes,

our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history.[[18]](#footnote-19)

He also discusses a second view of cultural identity, that he calls ‘‘a matter of `becoming' as well as of ‘being’’. He writes that this identity ‘belongs to the future as much as to the past’. [[19]](#footnote-20) These two aspects of cultural identity, shared experience and future projection, together constitute the Hong Kong identity characteristic of post-World War II Hong Kong Anglophone writing. Discourse of this period reflects both an experience of dislocation and a search for an enduring identity in the face of political-economic uncertainty. This identity is not fixed but defined by ‘constant transformation’, past, present and future, as a globalised centre of culture and trade that is ‘subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power’.[[20]](#footnote-21)

Writing in 1997, Abbas explains that,

Hong Kong has up to quite recently been a city of transients. Much of the population was made up of refugees or expatriates who thought of Hong Kong as a temporary stop, no matter how long they stayed.[[21]](#footnote-22)

Between 1945 and 1956, the Hong Kong population increased fourfold, due to an influx of around one million migrants fleeing the communist regime of the mainland and the return of multinational pre-war residents, comprised of colonist settlers and capitalist entrepreneurs.[[22]](#footnote-23) An identity of diaspora has come to define Hong Kong English writing since this time. Elaine Yee Lin Ho discusses the following Cold War period in which Hong Kong was the geopolitical transit point between London and Vietnam,[[23]](#footnote-24) and identifies how, from the 1970s to the 1980s, ‘the rise of the Chinese entrepreneur class’ foregrounded ‘complexities of Chinese identity in a globalizing world’.[[24]](#footnote-25) Barry Sautman writes that Hong Kong’s ‘heterogeneity has expanded since the early 1980s’, due to Hong Kong’s rapid globalisation and geographical position as a centre of trade and travel. Other global, socio-economic factors have increased the diversity of Hong Kong’s population, such as the Asian financial crisis of 1997, which saw a dramatic increase in the number of South East Asian domestic workers living in Hong Kong, as Hong Kong middle classes sought low-paid employees.[[25]](#footnote-26) The acceleration of migration in the post-declaration Hong Kong of the 1980s and 1990s magnified this diasporic identity further, as it ‘unravels the changing relationship between ‘places’ and ‘cultures’ as the sites of ‘home’ and ‘host’ begin to blur’.[[26]](#footnote-27)

Discussing the present-day magnification of Hong Kong’s identity of diaspora, Ho writes:

Diaspora assumes paradigmatic status in the study of globalization in the late twentieth century, its emphases on mobility, dispersal, and networks beyond national boundaries offering a requisite cultural model that complements the normative understanding of globalization as an economic phenomenon.[[27]](#footnote-28)

In contemporary Hong Kong Anglophone writing, globalisation is depicted as both a product and producer of Hong Kong’s diasporic and multiplicitous identity, through migratory and transcultural networks. As Lisa Lowe argues, the notion of migration, while denoting a history of physical displacement, can become attached to fixed cultural sites.[[28]](#footnote-29) Audrey Yue positions Hong Kong as one of such sites.[[29]](#footnote-30)

‘The difficulty with the local’, writes Abbas,

is in locating it, and this is particularly tricky in a place like Hong Kong with its significant proportion of refugees, migrants, and transients, all of whom could claim local status.[[30]](#footnote-31)

Leung Hon-chu traces shifting ideas of the ‘local’ by delineating jurisdictional changes regarding immigration and citizenship of mainland Chinese residents in the territory since 1949. Leung argues that ‘the awkward positions of residents in Hong Kong in relation to citizenship reflect the “anomalous” nature of Hong Kong as a “non-national society”’.[[31]](#footnote-32) Leung identifies how from the end of World War II to the 1966 and 67 riots, Mainland Chinese immigrants were ‘officially outsiders seeking sanctuary in a “foreign territory”’. Leung then categorises the following period up to 1997 as one in which ‘partial citizenship was extended to the majority of residents in Hong Kong and “new immigrants” from the mainland emerged as the excluded others of those who identify Hong Kong as “home”’.[[32]](#footnote-33) It is since the 1970s, argues Leung, that ‘negative stereotypes of Mainland immigrants’ have become prevalent, feeding off the idea of ‘potential immigrants from China as competitors for public resources and a threat to “the quality of life” of those already residing in Hong Kong’.[[33]](#footnote-34) These fraught discourses of belonging and exclusion continued through the affluent period that followed, magnified by increased ‘competition for jobs as a new wave of immigrants entered the labour market in the 1980s’.[[34]](#footnote-35) Many critics have pointed to the irony of Hong Kong’s branding as “Asia’s World City”, when racialised, socio-economic divisions remain prevalent. Barry Sautman, for example writes, ‘cultural racist world views on both sides’ of cross-border binaries have meant that the intermingling of people and cultures has involved at least as much acrimony as amity’.[[35]](#footnote-36) However, despite ‘Hong Kong’s ethnic hierarchy’,[[36]](#footnote-37) Hong Kong is now branded globally as a cosmopolitan dreamscape, defined by its international population and as a melting pot of world cultures.

Hong Kong’s diasporic identity is not only the result of physical migration but cultural translocation, catalysed by Hong Kong’s laissez-faire marketplace, as panoramically depicted in Han Suyin’s *A Many Splendoured Thing.* Wandering through Hong Kong’s central shopping district in 1949, Suyin’s narrator reflects:

There are no restrictions. And now that the rich have come from Shanghai there is plenty of free capital floating about, and there is a boom on.

There is a boom on. Superficially, Hongkong is dazzling with prosperity.[[37]](#footnote-38)

Abbas writes of this “boom” period that ‘most of the energy is directed toward the economic sphere’, whereby ‘the citizens' belief that they might have a hand in shaping their own history … gets replaced by speculation on the property or stock markets, or by an obsession with fashion or consumerism’.[[38]](#footnote-39) This preoccupation is then magnified with the beginning of Cold War in Asia in 1950, where the rapid propagation of ‘Western’ culture and internationalism is pitched against ideas of ‘the nation’ as ‘an oppressive construct’.[[39]](#footnote-40) As Ho writes, ‘much of the American money was channeled[sic] into [the publication of] prowestern articles … to disseminate the values of freedom and democracy that were identified with western culture’.[[40]](#footnote-41) Through this cultural transplantation, Abbas writes that ‘until as late as the seventies, Hong Kong did not realise it could have a culture’, besides the culture of, and attached to, foreign imports.

Abbas then identifies the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, as a pivotal moment in Hong Kong’s self-identification. He writes:

Just at the moment in the late seventies and early eighties when Hong Kong seemed to have successfully remade itself into a global city, the situation took a new turn. It was at this juncture that China reclaimed Hong Kong, as if it were a new Atlantis.[[41]](#footnote-42)

While this period between 1984 and 1997 may be understood as a ‘period when an "older" but still operative politics of national legitimacy’ gives way to a ‘"newer" politics of global flows, information, and the devalorization of physical boundaries’,[[42]](#footnote-43) Anglophone Hong Kong writing within this period also reflects an amplification of colonial nostalgia and political, economic and cultural anxieties. Unease about repatriation and the possible loss of Hong Kong’s unique identity is then magnified by the events of Tiananmen in 1989, which symbolised the felt threat to Hong Kong’s relative socio-political freedoms. Though without much political consequence in Hong Kong at the time,[[43]](#footnote-44) 1989 brought about a reconsideration of Hong Kong culture as something that needed protecting, and it is now commonly positioned at the beginning of Hong Kong’s pro-democracy movement. With the approach of 1997, Hong Kong Anglophone discourse reflects an inevitable amplification of these anxieties and an acceleration of emigration. While the handover itself is described as relatively anti-climactic,[[44]](#footnote-45) after the handover, this reconsideration of Hong Kong identity and culture has intensified exponentially. As Hong Kong’s economic prowess becomes increasing dubious, the city has witnessed a magnification of political activism, culminating in the pro-democracy demonstrations of 2014 and 2019.

**(Re)defining Globalised Hong Kong**

As a cosmopolitan city caught between a colonial past and repatriated future, in an official fifty-year period of “no change”, writing about Hong Kong in English is an increasingly complex challenge. ‘The challenge posed by globalization,’ writes Imre Szeman,

is that new approaches must be taken, and new discourses devised to explain the present. Everything is suddenly up for grabs, open to doubt, in need of revision. It is no longer possible to imagine that world as a collection of autonomous, monadic spaces, whether these are imagined as nations, regions with nations, or cultures demarcated by region or nation.[[45]](#footnote-46)

This multiplicity is amplified in Hong Kong’s present day environment, where conflicting political and cultural narratives produce ‘a fluctuating, insecure world, where islands and continents co-exist’ but in a dialogic struggle.[[46]](#footnote-47) Marianne W. Jørgensen and Louise J Phillips write that for an investigation of such complex identity discourse, ‘[a]n interdisciplinary perspective is needed in which one combines textual and social analysis’.[[47]](#footnote-48) For this reason, my methodology incorporates analysis of both local and migrant narratives gathered in my interviews,[[48]](#footnote-49) new reports, literature, and critical non-fiction, that jostle to represent the city and a dubious future, focusing on key moments or trends in Hong Kong English language writing between 1949 and the present.

I characterise this period as a localised embodiment of what Szeman calls a ‘“zone of instability”’.[[49]](#footnote-50) It is produced by

multiple, heterogeneous, and, in many cases, contradictory discourses ... of anti-imperialism and imperialism, nativism and Western philosophy, modernist discourses promising progress, and discourses concerning the role and political efficacy of literature, which of necessity must deal with imperialism, modernism and nationalism all at once.[[50]](#footnote-51)

As Hong Kong moves closer to 2047, the official end of no change period, encountering “Big Bay” development plans and diminishing global economic prowess,[[51]](#footnote-52) Hong Kong writers, both “local” and international, narrativize this ‘“zone of instability”’, seeking to cement an identity for a space caught between uncertain origins and an equally ambiguous future. While Eliza Wing-Yee Lee writes that ‘[c]ultural globalization ... involves a process of interaction of the global and the local’,[[52]](#footnote-53) for Hong Kong, the process of defining the ‘local’ is ongoing *during* this interaction. Whilst ‘globalization opens up possibilities for the redefinition of identities’, Anglophone Hong Kong writing increasingly seeks to find and define an “essential” Hong Kong identity. As globalisation expands ‘the realm of self-definition’, ‘the fragmentation and conflict of identities’ it ‘may also produce’ remains a central theme.[[53]](#footnote-54)

The notion of conflict inherent in contemporary Hong Kong identity discourse is magnified by the perpetual redefinition of Hong Kong taking place in legislation, infrastructural developments, news, creative media, and everyday exchanges, which draw on idealisations and speculation about what Hong Kong is or should be. As the editors of *Transforming Cities: Discourses of Urban Change* (2017) argue, ‘the city evolves as much through architecture and migration as through imagination and discursive constructions’.[[54]](#footnote-55) No city better illustrates the complexities of this imaginative ‘transformation’ than Hong Kong.[[55]](#footnote-56) Ngai Pun and Wu Ka-ming describe Hong Kong as rapidly entering a ‘“global condition” at a pace greater than its citizens could have imagined in previous years’ and identify a ‘rupture in Hong Kong’s urban Imagineering at the turn of the millennium ... [a]ccompanied by a deep sense of political frustration and the serious challenge of economic downturn’.[[56]](#footnote-57)(see also Michael Ingham 2003; Ackbar Abbas 1997; Eliza Wing-Yee Lee 2003). By ‘Imagineering’, they refer to the development of a

number of ambitious “global” projects including Cyberport, Herbalport and Disneyland, to speed up the restructuring of the Hong Kong economy [which] float ghostlike in and out of its citizens’ minds, spiralling through the electronic mass media, and involve a process of simulacramaking and remaking hyper-realities into the space of Hong Kong.[[57]](#footnote-58)

At the same time, Pun and Wu trace a dislocation of Hong Kong people from these ideations, writing that ‘the becoming of Hong Kong as a high-tech metropolis, a global city, mirrors the process of excluding its own society, a global city without its people’. When Pun and Wu discuss attempts by the government to ‘stabiliz[e] Hong Kong society’ they refer to methods of ensuring the city ‘remain[s] competitive in the global economy’.[[58]](#footnote-59) However, in parallel with this drive, many Hong Kong narratives reflect anxieties about the disappearance of a true or “lived” Hong Kong identity. In addition, this competitive discourse also fuels subscription to socio-political binaries, such as the branding of mainland visitors as ‘locusts’, in relation to a ‘battle for resources’.[[59]](#footnote-60) Both of these anxieties are reflected in narrative atmospheres of *instability*. While, ultimately, the identity of a globalised metropolis such as Hong Kong cannot be rendered ‘stable’ by any literary aesthetic, I argue that there are ways of writing about the city that do not position competition and potential disappearance at the core of such an identity. While Hong Kong has been historically marginalised and currently faces assimilation with the mainland as 2047 approaches, I propose that foregrounding the inherent fictionality of subjective experiences, representations, and idealisations of Hong Kong, can produce accounts of Hong Kong that are less fraught and defensive. This methodology is one of the aims of my “narrative state” framework.

**A Place for Nation?**

I found that the most anxious and self-marginalising Hong Kong narratives are those that adopt defensive and inward-looking ‘nation-building’ devices as outlined most famously by Benedict Anderson.[[60]](#footnote-61) This narrative approach is epitomised in the poetry of Louise Ho and Leung Ping-kwan, and in English news media such as the BBC and *South China Morning Post.* On the other hand, narratives like Xi Xi’s novella, *My City: A Hong Kong Story* (1993), and Leung’s *Islands and Continents* (2007), demonstrate other devices typically used to reinforce national identities, like the ideas of the shared imagination and the ‘simultaneity’ of lives, but to the effect of producing much less fraught narratives.[[61]](#footnote-62) Xi Xi’s playfully surrealist novella and Leung’s collection of magic realist short stories, depict a more fluid, subjective city space, less pressurised by master narratives and notions of threat. Across these various approaches, and to vastly varied effects, Anderson’s ‘nation-building’ devices can be traced from Han Suyin’s works to present-day texts, and are thus a useful lens through which to trace the origins and evolution of tropes of Hong Kong English language writing, ‘especially as postcolonial literature has been so deeply imbued with nationalist themes’.[[62]](#footnote-63)

Many contemporary critics identify a post-national or ‘supranational’ present, characterised by transnational social, economic and political and networks that make the idea of nation increasingly obsolete.(See Hugh Seton-Watson(1977), Eric J. Hobsbawm (2012), Kwame Anthony Appiah (2007).) However, by examining how ‘nation-building’ devices continue to underpin identity narratives it is possible to trace imaginary processes that underpin common tropes in Hong Kong writing, from lingering colonial legacies, to ideas about gender, race and ethnicity. For example, Judith Butler (2000), Cynthia Enloe (2000) and Elleke Boehmer’s (2005) argument that nation is theoretically and historically gendered is reflected in studies by Wu Ka-ming (2003), Eliza Wing-Yee Lee (2003) and Ngai Pun (2004), who discuss patriarchal ideologies that underpin Hong Kong citizenship legislation and narratives of identity and belonging. Responding to these gendered ideations, for example, I explore the implications and potentially subversive effects of using a female protagonist to ‘map’ post-colonial Hong Kong. Boehmer speculates that women writers might be positioned to ‘work their way around the patriarchal legacies embedded within nationalism’ and thus to ‘interrupt the duologue of colonial master and [nation space]’.[[63]](#footnote-64) This capacity for disruption is, of course, complicated by my position as a British writer in the post-colonial Hong Kong space, another example of discursive positionalities and ideas that the lens of ‘nation-building’ illuminates.

However, the connection of Hong Kong to ideas of “nation-ness” has, in recent years, become such a volatile topic, associated with the advocation of Hong Kong independence and anti-mainland sentiment, that it is essential to carefully outline my subsequent use of the terms ‘Nation’, ‘Nation-building’, ‘Nationalism’ (and later ‘minority nationalism’).[[64]](#footnote-65) While Anderson argues that ‘nation-ness is virtually inseparable from political consciousness’,[[65]](#footnote-66) I am making a clear distinction between the politically delineated ‘nation’, and ‘nation-building’, a set of narrative devices for imagining and constructing identity. While these nation-building practices often have political origins, influences and outcomes, I do not suggest that their use necessarily advocates a political agenda. Sautman identifies the shadows of ‘nation-building’ rhetoric in discourse about the ‘Hong Kong people’s “new identity”, pointing out its ‘almost sub-national connotations alongside Chinese nationality’.[[66]](#footnote-67) His discussion of the dominant Hong Kong/China binary in such narratives is crucial. As Wu Ka-ming discusses, ‘a sense of Hong Kong superiority is articulated ... through which people imagine a culturally bounded city-state’.[[67]](#footnote-68) Wu gives considerable attention to Emily Honig’s work on ‘created ethnicity’, explaining that this identity ‘discourse also reinforces the constructed ethnic identities such as “Hong Kong people” and “mainland Chinese”.[[68]](#footnote-69) Because of the antagonism that much Hong Kong identity discourse fuels, it is essential to explore how ‘nation-building’ tropes inform Hong Kong narratives and to foreground the fictionality and imaginary nature of ideas that underpin them. As Chen argues, ‘unless the cultural imaginary can be deconstructed, our actions, subjectivities, thoughts, social, political, and economic structures will remain configured in the same structures’.[[69]](#footnote-70)

Anderson writes, ‘to understand [nations and nationalisms] properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy’.[[70]](#footnote-71) Critics such as Wu Ka-ming, Chen, Abbas, and Chow and others allude to such fictionality when they use terms like ‘created’, ‘imagined’, and ‘constructed’ to describe ideas about Hong Kong identity. When Wu discusses the imaginary foundations of divisions between Hong Kong and the mainland, for example, she refers to Ann Stoler’s discussion of ‘nationalist discourse’.[[71]](#footnote-72) She describes this as ‘replete with ambiguous evaluations of breeding, cultivation, and moral essence’, where ‘“criteria of nationality”’ include ‘“shared morals, culture and perceptions, feelings that unite us without being able to say what they are”’.[[72]](#footnote-73) Aihwa Ong elaborates on this topic, ‘explor[ing] narrative practices that propagate such ideations and their discursive effects, as well as those that avoid fuelling antagonism’, and then proposes a way to move beyond ‘nation-building’.[[73]](#footnote-74) Ong’s term ‘ideation’[[74]](#footnote-75) is critical in the discussion of Hong Kong narratives. I use it to indicate a process by which ideas, ideals, prejudices, emotional responses to space, culture, politics and change, and memories, real or imaginary, collectively produce an ‘idea’ of identity that is not wholly derived from or traceable in objective reality but that plays a central role in shaping identity narratives.

**Mapping Hong Kong**

I consider both my selected texts and my own novel as subjective narrative ‘maps’ of identity networks and hierarchies within Hong Kong at their respective historical moments. Michael O’Sullivan argues:

while other regions consistently examine their peoples in terms of how the landscapes and topographies of borders influence their practices, psyche and literatures, this relationship is underexamined in the Hong Kong context.[[75]](#footnote-76)

My interdisciplinary project fills this glaring gap; it encompasses a critical exploration of the effect of Hong Kong’s borders on individual and collective narrative identities, considering not only Hong Kong’s geographical border with the Chinese mainland but other political and cultural borders, deadlines and intersections that both inform Hong Kong identity narratives.

In my investigation of the relationship between space and psyche, I consider prevalent methods of narrative “mapping”. The figure of the ‘flâneur’ is an illuminating framework through which to explore the relationship between protagonist, narrator, writer and Hong Kong. As a ‘vehicle for the examination of the conditions of modernity—urban life, alienation, class tensions’,[[76]](#footnote-77) the flâneur was first used by Charles Baudelaire in 1863 to explore the kaleidoscopic patterns of modernity in nineteenth-century Paris.[[77]](#footnote-78) This model was revisited by Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project* in the early twentieth century, to illuminate his vision of a phantasmagoric city,[[78]](#footnote-79) and then by Guy-Ernest Debord in *Society of the Spectacle*,[[79]](#footnote-80) in his politicised critique of commodity culture. I explore how characteristics of the flâneur, centrally positioned as ‘an expert reader of urban signs’,[[80]](#footnote-81) can be used to investigate hierarchies and psychical processes that underpin how Hong Kong and positionalities are “mapped”. While the flâneur is typically a masculine figure, ‘emblematic of nineteenth-century French literary culture’, [[81]](#footnote-82) as a speculative device, the flâneur remains relevant in the Hong Kong context.[[82]](#footnote-83) Bijan Stephen writes that he ‘has always been essentially timeless’ in the sense that he is characterised by detachment from the city space he inhabits.[[83]](#footnote-84) Stephan refers to Teju Cole’s *Open City*, in which narrator, Julius, navigates a ‘psychogeographic landscape’, as an example of the ‘historical insight’ that contemporary ‘flânerie’ has to offer. He suggests that the figure is ‘due for a revival’.

In my novel, as the protagonist, Anna, moves through the city, a space in which she is simultaneously outsider (as a tourist) and insider (as returning resident), her flânerie illuminates special and temporal disjunctures and overlaps as well as tensions between Hong Kong, the mainland, the West and the global. As Anna explores, she embodies key characteristics of the flâneur as outlined by Gregory Shaya: she is ‘keenly aware of the bustle of modern life’, using technology to navigate and document the globalised metropolis; in terms of plot, Anna’s search for her estranged friend Kallum, piecing together half-remembered clues, fixes her, quite literally, as ‘an amateur detective and investigator of the city’; as a solo female traveller, grappling with her socio-economic privilege and conspicuousness in the post-colonial space, she is ‘also a sign of the alienation of the city and of capitalism’.[[84]](#footnote-85) Furthermore, by transplanting these characteristics into both my female protagonist and my narrator, my narrative foregrounds the interplay of gender, narrative mapping and discursive authority in contemporary Hong Kong.

The flâneur narrative device is particularly illuminative since, as Deborah Parsons writes, he ‘register[s] the city as a text to be inscribed, read, rewritten and reread’. As he explores the city, ‘listening to its narrative’, he is preoccupied with ‘collecting, rereading and rewriting its history’.[[85]](#footnote-86) In my novel, this preoccupation is illuminated through a close focalisation of Anna’s thoughts as she mentally maps and re-maps Hong Kong and her own relationship to certain spaces. The idea of ‘cognitive mapping’, introduced by Edward Tolman in 1948 to describe the visualisation of the layout of a maze by rats[[86]](#footnote-87), has been used to explain the behaviour of humans in modern cities by urban geographers and social scientists from Kevin Lynch (1960)[[87]](#footnote-88) to Robert Lloyd (1989),[[88]](#footnote-89) Peter Knight (2002),[[89]](#footnote-90) and Simon Ungar (2005).[[90]](#footnote-91) In *Image of the City*, a study of the importance of urban design, Lynch writes:

Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences… Every citizen has had long associations with some part of his city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings.[[91]](#footnote-92)

His emphasis on individuals’ emotional and psychological connection with the city, considering also its temporal dimensions, is a valuable framework for analysing representations of the individual and collective identity constructions in Hong Kong narratives. A dominant idea in Anglophone Hong Kong writing is that the city’s continuous and rapid global development since the mid-twentieth century is reflected in the fluctuating identities and uncertain subjectivities of residents. Lynch’s model of individuals as both ‘observers’ and active ‘participants’ in the ‘spectacle’ of city life[[92]](#footnote-93) also informs the dual-observer/observed narrative structure of my novel.

Lynch argues,

The observer himself should play an active role in perceiving the world and have a creative part in developing his image... The environment suggests distinctions and relations, and the observer—with great adaptability and in the light of his own purposes—selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what he sees.[[93]](#footnote-94)

Lynch considers moments of disorientation as crucial indicators of the close relationship between subjective security or ‘emotional stability’ and city space.[[94]](#footnote-95) He writes,

The very word "lost" in our language means much more than simple geographical uncertainty; it carries overtones of utter disaster... [T]he generalized mental picture of the exterior physical world that is held by an individual… is the product both of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience, and it is used to interpret information and to guide action. The need to recognize and pattern our surroundings is so crucial, and has such long roots in the past, that this image has wide practical and emotional importance to the individual.[[95]](#footnote-96)

For my protagonist, becoming lost or disorientated in the city also signifies subjective disorientation or ‘losing’ an idea of self. Re-mapping the city is therefore bound with re-mapping the self, restructuring her identity.

Just as mapping the city responds to both the exterior physical world, memories, and intuition, my protagonist’s maps of the *self in relation to the city* reflects both physical and imaginary patterns. These ‘perception[s] [are] not sustained, but rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns’,[[96]](#footnote-97) and the ordering of these concerns can indicate subjective skews, prejudices and ideations transplanted onto her map of the physical city. As Lynch explains, ‘[p]otentially, the city is in itself the powerful symbol of a complex society’.[[97]](#footnote-98) Where physical navigation is ‘supported by the presence of others and by special way-finding devices: maps, street numbers, route signs, bus placards’,[[98]](#footnote-99) Anna’s subjective orientation is guided by both interactions with others, and by preconceptions of identity and social relations. Building on Suyin’s simultaneous explorations of city and subjectivity, I treat my protagonist’s narrative mapping of Hong Kong as a way of tracing her subjective orientations and identity constructions, of both self and other post-colonial collectives.

**Genres Since 1949**

In Chapter 1, I position Han Suyin’s *A Many Splendoured Thing* as an initiator of themes that dominate contemporary English Language Hong Kong narratives: hybridity, “inbetween-ness”,[[99]](#footnote-100) the force of a collective imagination, and Hong Kong as a site of psychological attachment. Ho categorises most Hong Kong English writing since the mid-twentieth century as ‘popular entertainment’[[100]](#footnote-101) and outlines a number of binaries and narrative formulae that characterise writing of this period, which are ‘hard to dislodge’.[[101]](#footnote-102) Ho outlines how although the geo-political turmoil such as ‘the tragedies of war-torn China, the exigencies of anti-colonial and post-colonial struggles, the battlefields of the cold war, the trauma of the Cultural Revolution’ unfold in the background of much Hong Kong writing, it is rarely the central concern of these texts. Romance is a popular genre of this period, including novels from Richard Mason’s *The World of Suzie Wong* (1957) to Janice Y. K. Lee’s contemporary work, *The Piano Teacher* (2009), both of which reflect a ‘familiar oppositional framework of tradition and modernity, East and West’.[[102]](#footnote-103) Hong Kong has also been the backdrop for espionage and thriller, like John le Carré’s *The Honourable Schoolboy* (1977), James Clavell’s *Noble House* (1981), and Robert Ludlum’s *The Bourne Supremacy* (1986), stories of the Japanese occupation, like John Lanchester’s *Fragrant Harbour* (2002),[[103]](#footnote-104) and psychopathological navigations of ‘a “Hong Kong” variously haunted and possessed by powerful colonialist, nativist, and capitalist forces’.[[104]](#footnote-105) Ho identifies ‘adventure’ the most dominant of popular genres, characterised by orientalist tropes, and the focus of my analysis in Chapter 3.

Some writers of this period, however, balance entertainment with a socio-political critique; writing like Han Suyin’s *A Many Splendoured Thing* (1952) and Christopher New’s *The Chinese Box* (1975) explore the ironies of colonial authority, while offering a panoramic depiction of the subjective instability caused by rapid globalisation and political flux. Ho categorises this writing as belonging to a more literary genre of ‘historical narrative’, the central themes of which are epitomised in the sub-category of the ‘1997 narrative’. ‘Historical’ Hong Kong writing, particularly that written since Hong Kong’s emergency as a centre of global trade in the late 1940s, and 1950s, can be characterised by a feeling of “inbetween-ness” and subjective disjuncture, where the momentum of modernity, progress and prosperity for a colonial and local entrepreneurial elite, paired with mass immigration, is at odds with the impoverished reality experienced by the local population, depicted in *A Many-Splendoured Thing* and in Austin Coates’s *The Road* (1959). This critique of structural inequalities is magnified in writing of the sixties, through the riots of 1967, to the seventies. In this period, rapid globalisation, increased social mobility of the local elite and the emergence of transnational identities are pitched against themes of conflicted loyalty to places and cultures and an underlying awareness of future uncertainty. These conflicts are most panoramically explored in Lee Ding Fai’s *Running Dog* (1980), which also explores the contrast between economic opportunity in Hong Kong and the bleak communist regime of mainland China, [[105]](#footnote-106) and ultimately ‘affirms traditional East-West binaries’.[[106]](#footnote-107) Such writing, however, also reflects increasing anxieties about the end of colonial governance.

These tropes of uncertainty mount through the 1980s and 1990s towards the 1997 handover. While some expatriate and local characters perceive the impending handover as a business opportunity, seen in Paul Theroux’s *Kowloon Tong* (1997), many narratives also depict mass apocalyptic sentiment and an amplification of colonial nostalgia. The familiar colonial system, while rife with exploitation and often critiqued with dark irony, is represented as known and relatively stable in comparison to potentially drastic changes to Hong Kong life that a Chinese “take over” or “take away” threatens. Binaries that dominate post-World War II fiction continue to shape narratives of this 1997 era; as Ho writes, while *Kowloon Tong* was ‘widely anticipated’, it ‘turned out to be a disheartening rehash of Britain-versus-China conflicts’ and ‘stereotyped’ oppositional characters.[[107]](#footnote-108)

**Many-Splendoured Identities**

From the stranded junk-boat party of Preston Schoyer’s *The Typhoon’s Eye* (1959) to Xu Xi’s transnationally-conflicted typecasts in *The Unwalled City* (2001), characters of this period typically find themselves adrift, half-conscious of imminent disaster, both personal and public, economic and political, but unable to break away from a stagnant present. Significant in both its depiction of social struggles with Hong Kong’s migrant community, and its portrayal of subjective responses to economic pressures and uncertainty, Suyin’s text is an illuminating start point from which to trace the evolution of these representations of Hong Kong subjectivity. As Wu identifies, Suyin’s work depicts ‘waves of refugees from China [who] flooded Hong Kong and ... made up the first generation of modern Hongkongers who found their economic opportunities in the colony and tried hard to climb up the ladder of social mobility’.[[108]](#footnote-109) (See also Tickell, 2019, p.434.) Suyin’s novel traces the love affair between her namesake narrator, a Eurasian doctor living in Hong Kong, and British reporter, Mark, as she explores both her own and the city’s transnational affiliations.

While perpetually re-evaluating her own identity and the ‘habitual schizophrenes’ she experiences as a ‘Eurasian’,[[109]](#footnote-110) Suyin uses a lyrical style to capture the frantic dynamism of 1949 Hong Kong: its international burgeoning free-market, immigration crisis, and social anxieties about the Chinese civil war, and collective ‘schizophrenic ideas’.[[110]](#footnote-111) While much Hong Kong English writing of the fifties and sixties reflects Homi K. Bhabha’s description on ‘hybrid’ identities produced by colonial regimes, Suyin’s methods of focalising the relationship between space and psyche set a precedent for much more self-reflexive, psychogeographical writing about Hong Kong that remains illuminating in contemporary contexts. While writing like Preston Schoyer’s *The Typhoon’s Eye* (1959) constructs identity across two-dimensional binaries,[[111]](#footnote-112) despite using a framework of inter-racial romance, Suyin models identity in this period as much more fluid and psychologically complex. Suyin embodies this complexity in her discussion of Eurasianism when she states ‘[b]eing Eurasian [as] not being born of East and West’ and describes it instead as ‘a state of mind’,[[112]](#footnote-113) perceiving her identity as less of a result of geographical emplacements than of psychological processes. This is further evidenced when Suyin explains ‘[w]e acquire split, two *layered* souls […] baffling to ourselves [my emphasis]’,[[113]](#footnote-114) reflecting the multi-dimensional complexity of subject construction. Whilst on one hand insisting ‘[w]e must carry oursel[ves] with colossal assurance and say: “Look at us, the Eurasians! […] the fusion of all that can become a world civilization […] envy us, you poor, one-world people, riveted to your limitations’,[[114]](#footnote-115) she simultaneously reflects, ‘I am terribly muddled’, explaining ‘[i]t is rather frightening to be so many different people, with so many dissimilar and equally compelling emotions, affections, ideas, *élans*, apprehensions, aware of so many delicate differences in restraint […] always so aware of shades of meaning’.[[115]](#footnote-116)

Stuart Hall writes that identities become increasingly fragmented and unstable in late modernity as they are

constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions … and are constantly in the process of change and transformation.[[116]](#footnote-117)

Where writers like Schoyer pin subjective disjuncture on transnational binaries, Suyin’s characters construct their identities not only according to nationality and race but also in relation to intersecting social subcategories. This multifarious positionality is exemplified in Suyin’s chance meeting with an acquaintance; reflecting ‘and here on the pavement, I run into my friend Anne Richards, American free-lance writer’, Suyin habitually identifies Anne’s nationality. Situating this meeting ‘on the pavement’, Suyin establishes such transnational meetings as commonplace in Hong Kong’s public spaces.[[117]](#footnote-118) She then lists the geographical location of their previous meetings: in ‘Chung King’, a ‘little United Nations [and as] both a foreign island in Hong Kong and an important part of the Chinese city's identity’;[[118]](#footnote-119) a ‘London […] cocktail party’; ‘here [in the Hong Kong shopping district]’.[[119]](#footnote-120) Recognising that she occupies multiple subject positions, Suyin reflects on her ‘variegated past’ and names her Eurasian background as the ‘reason’ she has ‘sauntered [into] many coteries, cliques and circles mutually hermetic to each other’.[[120]](#footnote-121) These locations situate Suyin within multiple spaces, not only geographically but also psychologically. Suyin depicts her protagonist’s feelings of being both “outside” and “inside”, simultaneously mingling with the colonial elite and observing her own ‘saunter[ing]’ with resentful detachment as she documents parallel poverty and squalor.[[121]](#footnote-122) Suyin’s novel thus stands apart from other Anglophone writing of this period by treating transnationality as a trigger for a whole range of further subjective multiplicities that exists in diasporic communities.

**Inbetween-ness**

Suyin’s novel “maps” the intricate and complex social networks that define her protagonist’s idea of the city. As Murphy writes, ‘though the nomenclature of the word “city” suggests something singular, a real city is of *course* nothing if not a heterotopic collection of many simultaneous things – a physical entity, an economic system, and a set of social relations’.[[122]](#footnote-123) For this reason, Suyin’s heterotopic map positions both narrator and author as a prototype of the contemporary Hong Kong flâneur, later developed, for example, by Wong Kar-wai in *Chungking Express* (1994),[[123]](#footnote-124) which interrogates the intersection between ‘the macro/official account and the micro/personal understanding of Hong Kong’.[[124]](#footnote-125) *A Many Splendoured Thing* depicts how people’s ‘subscri[ption] to the image of their city … as a free land of possibilities’[[125]](#footnote-126) may produce parallel feelings of ‘impermanen[ce]’[[126]](#footnote-127) and ‘placelessness’.[[127]](#footnote-128) She maps 1949 Hong Kong as an ‘overhanging rock poised above the abyss’,[[128]](#footnote-129) where subjects, including herself, embody this “inbetween-ness”;[[129]](#footnote-130) living in Hong Kong, says her narrator, is ‘like being on a boat that is capsizing’.[[130]](#footnote-131) In parallel with her characters, Suyin thus personifies the city, as her protagonist watches it ‘basking in the sun, ... rock of exile to so many; poised, expectant, waiting for the future just as we were’.[[131]](#footnote-132) Across societal demographics, Suyin represents Hong Kong residents as refugees, suspended between transnational affiliations, pasts and futures. Here, she exemplifies what Ho calls the ‘polyphony’ of Hong Kong,[[132]](#footnote-133) and the identity of diaspora that has become characteristic of Hong Kong anglophone writing.

Another enduring keystone of Suyin’s formula is her depiction of individuals clinging to the present; in defence against an uncertain future, characters ‘clutc[h] with fervour the shining momentary *now*’.[[133]](#footnote-134) Suyin depicts this as an imaginative attachment to space shared by individuals of diverse backgrounds and socio-economic demographics. This shared attachment resembles Anderson’s idea of nation that is ‘imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’.[[134]](#footnote-135) In Chapter 1, I explore how Suyin presents Hong Kong as a community bound together and to the Hong Kong space by their individual sojourner identities as ‘sitters-on-the-fence’.[[135]](#footnote-136) Though constantly reimagining their identities in relation to ideations of elsewhere (predominantly China and Britain), this sense of estrangement from “home” becomes a source of commonality and causes a deep sense of attachment to Hong Kong. As Ho writes,

During the 1950s and 1960s, Hong Kong,… an anachronism in decolonizing Asia[ a]nd a unique cold war geopolitical location,… became a haven for migrants, refugees, and émigrés. ‘Hong Kong’ in the novels of this period often appears as an enclave where, for a brief period, characters of different provenance and socio-political affiliations c[an] find a relative point of stability from which to reflect on their experiences.[[136]](#footnote-137)

Though Ho identifies Austin Coates’s *The Road* (1959) ‘one of the first to consider colonial Hong Kong as a society’,[[137]](#footnote-138) I argue that Suyin’s work, written eight years before, similarly ‘attempts to bridge the colonizer-colonized divide’ and other socio-economic divisions by presenting Hong Kong as a society bound together by a shared feeling of displacement. Though not a nation in the political sense, this feeling of belonging-through-not-belonging underpins the type of ‘fervour[ous]’,[[138]](#footnote-139) ‘emotional’, and ‘deep attachments’ to Hong Kong locality that I argue are precursive to contemporary Hong Kong identity construction.[[139]](#footnote-140)

It is this ‘nation-building’ sentiment, triggered by anxiety and ideas of defence, that I pinpoint as potentially problematic when these themes become magnified in contemporary narratives. Writing in 1997, Abbas describes Hong Kong as ‘being neither here nor there’, calling it ‘not so much a place as a space of transit ... a port in the most literal sense – a doorway, a point in between’, an idea that he argues underpins the potential ‘disappearance’ of Hong Kong identity.[[140]](#footnote-141) Like Suyin, contemporary critics link anxieties about the future to a fixation on the present in present day Hong Kong discourse. Ingham writes,

whilst it is true for Hong Kong English writers that we cannot expect to know who we are or where we are going, without knowing where we have come from, there is clearly a discernible focus on the here and now.[[141]](#footnote-142)

**‘Minority Nationalism’ and the ‘Here and Now’**

I investigate this focus on the ‘here and now’ across a range of ‘local’ English language literature, news media, and in my interview transcripts. Hobsbawm argues that national or collective identities are

dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analysed from below ... in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist.[[142]](#footnote-143)

While this “above” and “below” model of identity formation is perhaps redundant in the age of global networks, it is important to acknowledge the various discursive levels on which dominant ideas about Hong Kong identity are constructed. While ‘Hong Kong Nationalism’ is a minority political movement, propagated in 2014 in a few articles published by the Hong Kong University Students’ Union and is largely rejected by the general population,[[143]](#footnote-144) as many Hong Kong critics (Wu and Pun 2004; Lee 2003; Leung 2004) point out, its foundational discursive mechanisms, such as defensive re-definition of the Hong Kong identity across a pervasive Hong Kong-versus-mainland binary, are echoed in texts from legislature to the language of ‘ordinary people’.[[144]](#footnote-145)

These discursive themes take the form of what Will Kymlicka and Christine Straehle call ‘minority nationalism’. ‘[N]ational minorities’ are ‘sizeable, territorially-concentrated’, ‘ethnocultural groups which think of themselves as nations within a larger state’.[[145]](#footnote-146) Kymlicka and Straehle explain how,

[c]onfronted with state nationalism, these groups have typically resisted pressure to assimilate into the majority nation ... particularly when these minorities historically exercised some degree of self-government which was stripped from them when their homeland was involuntarily incorporated into the larger state, as a result of colonisation ... or the ceding of territories from one imperial power to another.[[146]](#footnote-147)

Many contemporary Anglophone Hong Kong narratives reflect this minority outlook, foregrounding the ‘threat’ of having post-colonial autonomy “stripped” away and fuelling the idea of resistance. In addition to these political pressures, narratives foreground economic competition from other Asian megacities[[147]](#footnote-148) as well as ‘increasing international interdependence in the form of the globalization of culture, media and communication’.[[148]](#footnote-149) These pressures, which underpin Abbas’s ‘politics of disappearance’,[[149]](#footnote-150) trigger an increasing concern with preserving or, at the very least, constructing a distinctly “local” identity. Writers like Leung Ping-kwan, for example, search for a ‘fresh angle’,[[150]](#footnote-151) ‘seek[ing] to sing new their own (our) ditties rather than ‘yours’’.[[151]](#footnote-152) Leung, Xu Xi and Louise Ho draw attention to their own and Hong Kong’s diasporic heritage, both in their works and symbolically, by writing in or translating into English. However, when celebrating Hong Kong’s ‘place on the margins’[[152]](#footnote-153), they do so with a resistance to being *marginalised*, echoing the ‘minority’ sentiment that characterises Kymlicka and Straehle’s ‘minority nationalist’ imagination. Placing Hong Kong as ‘always at the edge of things or between places’[[153]](#footnote-154), depicting Hong Kong as a ‘marginal leaf’, Leung does so defiantly.[[154]](#footnote-155) Ho similarly encourages the Hong Kong subject to ‘[s]tand your ground/ even if for only/ two foot square’.[[155]](#footnote-156)

However, I conclude Chapter 1 by illuminating why, for Hong Kong identity discourse, ‘it is no longer productive’[[156]](#footnote-157) for the Anglophone writer to depend upon this ‘minority nationalist’ sentiment when writing about Hong Kong. In the age of global economic and cultural networks, not only does this ‘minority-nationalist’ discourse encourage narratives of division, but it presents Hong Kong identity as always threated by, in competition with, or defined by ‘elsewhere’. I refer to a ‘territorial’ type of narrative, drawing on Anderson’s use of the term when he writes,

[w]e can detect the seeds of territorialisation of faiths which foreshadows the language of many nationalists (‘our’ nation is ‘the best’) – in a competitive, comparative field.[[157]](#footnote-158)

This competitiveness is most clear in my research interviews, as participants seek to define Hong Kong as unique, highlighting Hong Kong’s superlative international environment: its transnational population and commerciality, fixing Hong Kong in competition with elsewhere. Furthermore, by positioning Hong Kong as a central location from which to travel to other Asian cities and emphasising its range of international products and cuisine, participants *foregrounded* the “elsewhere”. In such cases, when pressed to define what was “authentically local”, participants responded only that it was ‘confusing’[[158]](#footnote-159) or ‘difficult’ to identify.[[159]](#footnote-160)

I do not wish to argue that acknowledging internationality and transnational dependence *necessarily* causes the disappearance of a “local” identity, instead I wish to demonstrate that over-emphatic, defensive attention to the “local” only magnifies the reality of transnational interdependency. I conclude Chapter 1 by defining the image of Hong Kong produced in these competitive, comparative ‘nation-building’ narratives as a “nation-like space”, a simile of ‘nation’ but burdened with the notion of its own intangibility. My new methodology directs Hong Kong English language writing away from this impasse; as Arjun Appadurai writes, ‘the role of contemporary intellectual practices’ is to ‘identify’ crisis and ‘in identifying it to provide part of the apparatus of recognition for post-national social forms’.[[160]](#footnote-161) Building on Suyin’s lyricism and methods of “mapping”, and not without crucial consideration of my own positionality (Chapter 3), I develop a methodology for writing about Hong Kong that acknowledges the city’s diaspora but without fixing Hong Kong as dependant on, threatened by, or defined by elsewhere.

**The “Hong Kong-centric” Narrative**

My methodology builds on a strong foundation of local English language Hong Kong literature that ‘centralises’ Hong Kong. As Ho writes in her review of post-World War II Hong Kong writing,

in the more accomplished titles, the ‘local’ is imaginatively reinvented in ways that address history and the everyday so that ‘Hong Kong’ is not just setting or backdrop but integrated into the characterization and narrative drama.[[161]](#footnote-162)

This type of writing makes Hong Kong, not “elsewhere”, the focus of characterisation and plot. I identify this centralising formula in Xi Xi’s *My City: A Hong Kong Story*, translated by Eva Hung in 1993; *Islands and Continents* (2007), by Leung Ping-kwan, a collection of short stories with various translators; and the 2017 ‘From Ocean to Horizon’ art exhibition at the Centre for Contemporary Chinese Art (CFCCA). By considering these artworks as identity “texts”, the inclusion of this artistic study provides yet another means of widening my ‘toolbox’ of methods of representing Hong Kong.

The above works are distinctive in their shared depictions of connectivity. *My City* is a surrealist depiction of Hong Kong life in the 1970s, set ‘before it is clear that Hong Kong would revert to Chinese rule’.[[162]](#footnote-163) Though told primarily from the adolescent perspective of Fruits, it is comprised of the voices of many generations who seem to speak to one another across fluid temporal boundaries. Stories in *Islands and Continents* span the Sino-British Declaration and handover period. However, whilst characters’ crises typically involve them questioning their social positionality, they return to the importance of community and social inclusion. ‘From Ocean to Horizon’ represents aspects of Hong Kong life at the 20th anniversary of the handover but moves beyond the repetition of typical themes of fragmentation and “inbetween-ness”. Instead, artists foreground the inextricability of urban geography, horticulture, and lived Hong Kong experience, linking space and psyche in transformative ways. While economic and political turbulence is present in the background, for Xi, Leung and CFCCA artists, Hong Kong is first-and-foremost ‘a place to live, to work, and to have fun'.[[163]](#footnote-164) They locate Hong Kong, spatially and psychologically, as an anchor for subjectivity. Though acknowledging Hong Kong’s diasporic community, they do so in a way that ‘evok[es] [both] the local and international dimensions of this extraordinary place’.[[164]](#footnote-165) In distinct contrast with Suyin’s depiction of Hong Kong as a ‘boat that is capsizing’,[[165]](#footnote-166) these writers and artists imaginatively re-negotiate Hong Kong’s inbetween-ness and uncertain past and future with quiet confidence in the endurance of a distinct Hong Kong identity. Hong Kong is a ‘home’ space, rather than a substitute; it is a place to return to and settle in, rather than a midpoint. In these works, the narrative focus remains *within* Hong Kong, even when characters move around the globe.

Xi reframes ‘this little city under our feet’, arguing that Hong Kong has ‘in fact[,] many places worth travelling to [like] the fishing boats here, and the harbour, and the beaches under the summer sun, and the brilliant lights in the city at night’.[[166]](#footnote-167) In this description, Hong Kong’s identity is derived from the topographical features and spatial contrasts *inside* Hong Kong, rather than between Hong Kong and other cities and nations. In all these works, the ‘here and now’ is mapped through understated, self-consciously subjective, personal experiences, memories and attachments to Hong Kong. They make no assertion of a single definite Hong Kong identity, instead they are playful with the idea that identity construction of places and people is always tinged with “unreality”, celebrating ‘nonsense’.[[167]](#footnote-168) The imaginative spaces they depict seem to transcend the background reality of political intervention and economic competition. In my own work, I draw on their methods of highlighting multiple, subjective voices and perspectives, both as a way of avoiding ‘marginalising’ Hong Kong, moving away from a typical focus on master narratives of globalisation or ‘nation’, and to undermine the idea that a single perspective or formula can authoritatively represent Hong Kong.

The translated nature of Xi and Leung’s texts, from Chinese into English, foregrounds how techniques in English specifically can be used in Hong Kong-centralising narratives. For example, in Eva Hung’s discussion of her translation of *My City,* she describes the challenge of translating Chinese verbs which ‘do not denote tenses and are as a result capable of suggesting an eternal present’.[[168]](#footnote-169) She explains her concern with avoiding ‘clearly marked boundaries’ and instead preserving Xi Xi’s ‘seamless transitions’ between time frames. She writes, ‘there is no denying the fact that the insertion of tense differences affects the flow of the narrative,’ and thus opts for the simple present tense for most of the narrative.[[169]](#footnote-170) The text thus resists echoing the constant apprehension of ‘deadlines’[[170]](#footnote-171) that underpins the fragility of Suyin, Xu Xi, and Ho’s pictures of Hong Kong and instead conveys a sort of ‘timelessness’.[[171]](#footnote-172) Such issues with translation illuminate choices I make within my own Hong Kong novel when considering how to create this ‘timeless’ atmosphere in a move away from ideas of ‘deadlines’ and apocalyptic futures. Equally, I respond to the visual devices used by artists of the 2017 ‘From Ocean to Horizon’ Exhibition as a type of “translation”. I examine extra-linguistic ways of representing the collective community, imaginative attachments to space and subjective experience of Hong Kong, and consider how to transcribe them in English. Again, this process illuminates the effects of linguistic choices in my narrative. Tang Kwok-hin, for example, repositions Hong Kong’s boundary or non-spaces, such as concrete verges and barbed-wire walls, as central focal points, presenting liminal spaces as both areas of significance, beauty, and as points of connection rather than division. This re-centralisation acts as a metonym for the re-centralisation of Hong Kong itself. I similarly reimagine margins and liminal spaces in my own creative work, making them settings for interpersonal interactions and drawing the narrative gaze.

**Reconstructing (through) Genre**

My positionality as a British writer complicates my ability to write a Hong Kong-centric narrative, given the history of English language print capital misrepresenting, appropriating and demarcating colonial and post-colonial spaces. For this reason, my methodology combines and reimagines tropes of multiple genres, from autoethnography and life-writing to the adventure narrative, with the aim of decolonising my writing and de-centralising my protagonist, narrator and self as author. My use of an expatriate protagonist to focalise the narrative builds on a trend in Hong Kong writing from the 1970s to the 1980s, whereby ‘expatriation, beyond designating a condition of residence, becomes more clearly visible as a critical perspective on Hong Kong’.[[172]](#footnote-173) While addressing Hong Kong’s narrative subordination beneath master narratives of Chinese Nationalism, British colonialism and globalism, I also challenge the assumed authority or ‘dominance’ of my own voice, a metonym of the ‘White/Western voic[e]’.[[173]](#footnote-174) I consider Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”,[[174]](#footnote-175) in which she targets postcolonial scholars who silence subalterns by preventing them from speaking with their own voice. When I include local voices in my critical study, in the form of primary interviews, and in my novel, embodied in characters like Kallum and Mr Wang, I am careful to do so not with any chauvinistic claim of ‘giving a voice to the subaltern’[[175]](#footnote-176) but, instead, to challenge any authoritative claims of myself as researcher and of my protagonist and narrator, respectively.

I therefore interrogate the conventions of autoethnography, a genre which typically ‘re-centers the researcher’.[[176]](#footnote-177) As Satoshi Tyosaki writes,

[b]ecoming a de/postcolonial autoethnographer … marks a pledge or commitment for our continuous self-reflexive labor to ... become more aware of … and possibly challenge the relationality through which we became ... autoethnographers.[[177]](#footnote-178)

I address this relationality by interrogating the privileged positionality of a British writer in the post-colonial space, sign-posting his/her inability to represent the local space with any authority. I therefore play with the notion that ‘autoethnographic stories [are] “artistic and analytical demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experiences”(Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013)’,[[178]](#footnote-179) highlighting the narrator’s biases and inability to understand her experiences, even as the story progresses. Where, as Devika Chawla and Ahmet Atay write, ‘autoethnography’s intent was to provide scholarly space to the lived experiences of the under-represented, oppressed, and marginalized’,[[179]](#footnote-180) I reimagine the potential of this genre. I use my over-represented ‘white-western voic[e]’[[180]](#footnote-181) to illuminate my own subjective skews and thus avoid further marginalising Hong Kong in my writing.

When dramatizing in order to destabilise the ‘self-absorbed individualism’ of White/Western social-scientific enquiry and postcolonial writing,[[181]](#footnote-182) I draw on conventions of the life-writing genre. Life-writing, explains Rota, can interrogate the non-linearity of lived-experience, psychological disjuncture, and ‘tangled’ subjectivity. Where autobiography is ‘descriptive’, life writing is ‘performative’ of the constructed nature of such description. This performative aspect of the genre allows me to foreground the narrative processes by which my protagonist, Anna, maps Hong Kong, constructing identity according to her own biases and frameworks. I also perform the protagonist’s recognition of her inability to know the extent of her own ignorance and biases. Narrative non-linearity allows me to showcase the subsequent ‘self-estrangement’ Anna experiences, which Rota calls the driving force of life-writing.[[182]](#footnote-183) Though my narrative is entirely steered by Anna’s decisions and biases, the formal third person distance between narrator and protagonist creates space for (self-)critique and she thus becomes ‘both subject and object of ... self-knowledge and interpretation’.[[183]](#footnote-184) It is this ‘process of self-estrangement and doubling’, writes Rota, ‘that engenders differentiation of self rather than repetition’.[[184]](#footnote-185) My dual-flâneur model elevates this self-estrangement; hyper-aware of her own perceptive and discursive deficiencies, Anna embodies someone who is less likely to repeat or ‘reproduce the very dominance and oppression against which [the post-colonial writer] fight[s]’.[[185]](#footnote-186)

**‘Gweilo’ Hong Kong Writing**

My self-decentralisation responds to my analysis of Martin Booth’s *Gweilo; Memories of a Hong Kong Childhood*. Booth’s novel is an autobiographical account of his 1950’s childhood as a British immigrant exploring the New Territories, Kowloon, and The Peak, where his father is stationed. *Gweilo* typifies the Anglophone adventure narrative, echoing the ‘narrative formula’ established by writers like James Clavell, whose ‘novels have moulded the popular international recognition of Hong Kong, setting the city up within a specific type of China-West cultural encounter’.[[186]](#footnote-187) As Booth’s novel maps late-colonial Hong Kong and the British child narrator’s relationship to this space, Hong Kong and Hong Kong voices are discursively marginalised in relation to the narrative voice that quickly claims authority. Firstly, Booth exemplifies problematic legacies of English in the colonial space, establishing his own voice as an authority. On one hand, Ingham writes that

there is ... no reason per se why contemporary Hong Kong literature ... should not be represented in some small part by English-language voices ... [T]he post-colonial critique of the language of the colonizer, as defined so incisively by Fanon, Memmi, Said and others, is rapidly becoming superseded by the cultural and linguistic depredations of global imperialism and monoculture ... in which English is the language of power and capital.[[187]](#footnote-188)

However, while this may be true for local writers who choose to write about Hong Kong in English (for a combination of reasons including personal preference, international accessibility, and the symbolic re-purposing of English), for non-native writers, Anglophone narrative formulae remain problematic. As Szeman argues, ‘literature – and especially the novel – is seen as the privileged intellectual tool by which it is possible to delineate space, domesticate it, concretize it, manage it, and make it less abstract’.[[188]](#footnote-189) The novel’s symbolic authority over space, paired with Booth’s privileged post-colonial positionality (as both writer and protagonist), establishes a discursive hierarchy that the retrospective narrator never fully subverts.

My methodology responds to Booth’s approaches to mapping the “away” space. Initially alarmed by and alienated from Hong Kong, his narrator soon embodies the archetypal ‘explorer’ who, through courageous self-immersion, is rewarded with a thorough understanding of the foreign space.[[189]](#footnote-190) Booth overtly and covertly stakes a ‘claim’[[190]](#footnote-191) to Hong Kong, a ‘command of their language’,[[191]](#footnote-192) ‘free access’ to Hong Kong’s spaces,[[192]](#footnote-193) his narrative style and structure 'exud[ing] authority'.[[193]](#footnote-194) Early on, the child protagonist claims superiority over locals and other “gweilos” like his parents, who speak from a ‘strong foundation of ignorance’.[[194]](#footnote-195) Mapping power structures and societal relationships he reasserts the claimed panoptic authority of the White/Western voice,[[195]](#footnote-196) looking down over Hong Kong from The Peak singing ‘‘I’m sitting on top of the world’’,[[196]](#footnote-197) and asserting, ‘I knew there were boundaries in life and roughly where they lay’.[[197]](#footnote-198) In this way, Booth’s narrator’s position at the centre of his map resembles that of the Baudelairean flâneur:[[198]](#footnote-199) ‘an expert reader of urban signs’,[[199]](#footnote-200) occupying a ‘panoramic view[-point]’.[[200]](#footnote-201) Furthermore, like Clavell’s novels, which ‘contain a heady mix of orientalist depictions of China and terms that supposedly capture Chinese cultural essence’,[[201]](#footnote-202) *Gweilo* exemplifies what Ingham calls the ‘pitfalls of exoticizing stereotype and formulaic depiction of character and locale’,[[202]](#footnote-203) and in so doing further subordinates the local space and people.

**Creative Re-mapping**

In my own narrative, I therefore use the English language self-consciously. On one hand, I strive to ‘avoi[d] cliché and essentializing narrative description and characterization’, which ‘must remain the self-appointed task of the Hong Kong English fiction writer’.[[203]](#footnote-204) At the same time, I foreground the positionality of my protagonist and self as writer in the narrative “mapping” process. I argue that Ryan Nock’s definition of mapping, an essentialist ‘concern with understanding or seeing’,[[204]](#footnote-205) should, in this post-colonial narrative context, also concern a delineation of the *relationship* of the writer to the space he/she maps. I thus “map” the protagonist’s realisation that this understanding can only ever be, at best, incomplete, and skewed, and counter any ‘truth-telling’ claims that my autoethnographical approach might suggest.

Said outlines his ‘methodological devises for studying authority’, first discussing, ‘*strategic location[;]* the author’s position in a text,’ which ‘includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes and motifs that circulate in his text - all of which’, in the orientalist text, ‘contain[n] the Orient ... representing it or speaking in[sic] its behalf’.[[205]](#footnote-206) Writing a novel alongside my critical study is essential as it allows me to not only illuminate my own *strategic location* but to creatively perform the discursive effects of my positionality, bias and prejudices. I embody these effects in my unreliable protagonist whose thoughts focalise the narrative. The narrative is comprised of fragments of Anna’s reflections in 2014 and in 2017, focalised through a third person-narrator who shares the perceptive gaze of both but is distanced enough to simultaneously watch how Anna interacts with her surroundings. This structure positions Anna as both observer and observed. This necessary self-reflexivity is facilitated by my repurposing of the 19th Century Baudelairean flâneur (1863), the detached, male observer of modern life.[[206]](#footnote-207) While Anna, observing the city, is detached because of her outsider positionality as a Western woman travelling in Hong Kong, the narrator, observing Anna, is detached from immediate experience through the third person structure. This dual perspective constitutes my ‘dual-flâneur’ narrative methodology,[[207]](#footnote-208) a foundation for new post-colonial psycho-urban explorations. I draw on the flâneur model as a ‘viewing-device’;[[208]](#footnote-209) to explore cognitive patterns and critical omissions made by each temporal instance of Anna, when previously exploring Hong Kong and now in the present.

This allows for a degree of self-reflection both between timeframes (2014 and 2017). As flâneur, Anna’s ‘movement creates anachrony’; Kirsten Seale writes that as the flâneur ‘travels urban space, the space of modernity’, he is ‘forever looking into the past … revert[ing] to his memory of the city’.[[209]](#footnote-210) By juxtaposing memory and immediate experience as if they are happening in the same narrative present, I undermine the reliability of Anna’s perception. Furthermore, this narrative space is uncanny, populated with two parallel observers: Anna’s past and present “selves”. Focalised through the third-person narrator who “accesses” the thoughts of both, these temporal instances of Anna appear to watch each other, facilitating an intense self-scrutiny and moments of irony. Where Booth locates ignorance in other “gweilo” characters like his parents, and overlooks his own ignorance and privileged positionality, my ‘dual-flâneur’ structure positions both past and present instances of Anna as equally ignorant, illuminating parallels between her and her culturally naïve mother.

Furthermore, each instance of Anna is surreally aware of being watched; as observer herself, she reciprocates the narrator’s gaze and appears to “watch-back”. Not only is Anna critiqued, but her reciprocal gaze foregrounds a parallel critique of the narrator. Despite third person formal distance, my narrator is equally unable to overcome or navigate ignorance. Where Booth positions his retrospective narrator, and himself as writer, as “now knowing better”, my novel foregrounds the *ongoing* complicity of both protagonist, narrator and writer in structural inequalities, despite attempts to overcome this.

**New Adventures**

I consider Booth’s text a neo-adventure story and construct my methodology in opposition to many of his tropes, particularly the knowing and symbolically conquering explorer. Opposing Booth’s authoritative claim over space, my novel is therefore an “anti-neo-adventure”. Like John M. Coetzee’s anti-adventure novel, *Foe*, my novel ends with the protagonist’s disorientation and magnified uncertainty, that directly opposes to the mastery of the colonial adventurer. At the same time, however, like *Foe*,[[210]](#footnote-211) I use an adventure trope of journeying to communicate my critical de-colonial message. I use elements of the adventure framework, firstly a way of testing how successfully my methodology counteracts discursive hierarchies in this target genre. Secondly, I use the adventure novel as a means of communicating my critical message to a wide, non-specialist audience. The message carried by my plot is less pedagogical than introspective and self-critical; as she narrates, Anna is her own ‘ideal postcolonial critic[,] best understood as a particularly alert reader, who closely observes the ... dynamics of interpretation as they unfold’.[[211]](#footnote-212). I present this self-critique, however, with the hope that my personal experiences and reflections will inspire a similar process of introspection in my readers.

As Phillips’ argues,

[c]ritical adventures, like their more conservative (colonial) counterparts, are capable of reaching broad audiences and making an impression on popular readerships, packaging powerful political and geographical messages in an appealing, readable narrative form.[[212]](#footnote-213)

My novel can, therefore, also be described as a “neo-anti-adventure”. The novel allows me to reflect on the human complexity of issues that a purely critical analysis would fail to capture. I respond to Said’s argument that ‘what has really been lost [for critical scholarship] is a sense of the density and interdependence of human life, which can neither be reduced to a formula nor be brushed aside as irrelevant’.[[213]](#footnote-214) I foreground the protagonist’s experience of intricately complex social interactions and moments of emotional connection. Just as *Foe*’s Susan Barton recognises that enclosing a story in a single narrative perspective is a subjugating act,[[214]](#footnote-215) my protagonist’s encounters with other local and migrant voices point to the irreducible complexity of social and imaginative networks that comprise contemporary Hong Kong identity, and the process of writing about such a space.

The novel thus allows for a more involved interrogation of what Said calls, ‘*strategic formation*[;] the relationship between texts and ... the culture at large’.[[215]](#footnote-216) My contribution to Hong Kong English language writing interrogates rather than asserts my authority to do so. As Jennifer Harding and E. Deidre Pribram argue, while ‘one cannot completely escape one’s own understandings’, writing ‘can at least, make it possible to ask new questions of our own understandings’.[[216]](#footnote-217) My ‘dual-flâneur’ structure dramatises this questioning, encouraging readers to participate in the critique of socio-discursive dynamics. As Jacques Derrida argues, ‘[t]he movement of deconstruction does not destroy structures from the outside ... nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures’.[[217]](#footnote-218) While many writers, like Coetzee, have chosen to interrogate colonial texts, my narrative aims to expose these discursive inequalities “as they happen”, refusing to present them as a problem of other times, other people and other texts. It is for this reason that I have not simply chosen to refrain from writing about Hong Kong altogether, thus negating the problematic legacies of English language post-colonial Hong Kong but instead to transparently engage with these difficulties. I thus ‘resis[t] the temptation to assume critical distance’[[218]](#footnote-219) from the structural inequalities that my text exposes. This study concludes by positioning my own novel as one of many voices, inherently fictional, thus challenging the notion that a singular narrative can represent Hong Kong.

**Chapter 1: Mapping Hong Kong Identity from 1949 to the Present**

**Suyin’s “Nation-building”**

Han Suyin’s 1952 novel, *A Many-Splendoured Thing,* represents the origins of contemporary tropes of English language Hong Kong identity discourse, particularly ideas of shared belonging and an individual and collective ‘search for security’, that have defined Anglophone Hong Kong writing since the mid twentieth century. Suyin’s narrative can be read as a lyrical “map” of preoccupations and socio-political patterns in 1949 Hong Kong society. Suyin explores shifting societal power relations as the Chinese Communist Revolution triggers an influx of refugees from the Chinese mainland, and as colonial hierarchies mutate in Hong Kong’s emerging, global free-market. Suyin’s novel is an early example of socio-political critique, a form adopted later by writers such as Coates, in *The Road* (1959), which highlights divisions between the colonial elite and an impoverished local majority. Coates’s narrative foregrounds disparity between the idealisation of a new road-building project, envisioned as harbinger of modernity for local villages, and the reality of capitalist exploitation. Coates uses narrative irony to criticise colonial authority, culminating in the image of colonial officials oblivious to the consequences of their socio-economic ignorance.[[219]](#footnote-220) Christopher New undertakes a similar critique in his 1975 novel, *The China Box*. New’s narrative focalises the socio-economic exploitation of the local population displayed by both colonial authorities and by the wealthy Chinese elite. The text is also illuminative of a flawed legal system that the colonial system facilitates.[[220]](#footnote-221)

Like Suyin, both Coates and New present socio-economic systems as pressurised by a sense of future uncertainty. In Suyin’s novel, Hong Kong’s future is dependent on the ‘revolution[’s] conclusion; whether there will be war or not [and] on politicians, ... economics, and markets’.[[221]](#footnote-222) Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone explain that ‘‘[s]ociety’ does not remake itself as an abstract entity[;] there must be corresponding transformations at the level of individual consciousness’.[[222]](#footnote-223) This idea is reflected in Suyin’s map of Hong Kong identity. The uncertainty of Hong Kong’s present, due to the transforming political and economic climate, is internalised by characters who see themselves as geographically, temporally and ideologically inbetween. Against the politically uncertain backdrop, Suyin, for example, perpetually re-evaluates her own ‘Eurasian’ identity;[[223]](#footnote-224) her political ideologies, pitching her communist sympathies against her affair with Mark, the ‘imperial British newspaperman’;[[224]](#footnote-225) and the “inbetween-ness” of the present. As she reflects, ‘this was the present, the moment now [a]nd the future, in spite of all predictions ... still remained completely unknown’.[[225]](#footnote-226) These ideas of “inbetween-ness” dominate Anglophone Hong Kong narratives that follow, particularly those which, like Suyin, weave together the personal and the public. For example, New’s *The Chinese Box*, set during the 1967 riots, is comprised of fragments of a fictional newspaper and the story of his protagonist, Dimitri Johnston, a European Hong Kong academic. Johnston and his wife experience a sense of subjective disjuncture and paralysis, and they are overwhelmed with feelings of failure, disintegration, and unrest. Dimitri’s brief extra-marital affairs ultimately fail to re-anchor his subjectivity, fraught with indecision and irresolution. The turbulent political landscape, along with the suicide of his wife, leave Dimitri even more uncertain of his and Hong Kong’s futures, which parallel one another. Like Suyin’s novel, Hong Kong, with all its uncertainty, becomes an anchor for equally uncertain identities.

Somewhat paradoxically, Suyin presents Hong Kong’s temporal, geographical and political “inbetween-ness” as a source of social cohesion. Consequently, ‘men with nowhere else to go [besides the] bustling eternal market Hong Kong’[[226]](#footnote-227) become a community, held together by a shared conception of themselves as ‘no more or less than anybody else, transient [and] imperfect in a world of endless inconsistency’ and ‘like so many others, subjects of destiny’.[[227]](#footnote-228) Suyin’s narrative map of identity formation thus sets a precedent for much later Hong Kong writing and depictions of what Anthony Fung calls ‘the formation and reinforcement of imagined communities crystalized around the label of ‘Hong Kong people’’.[[228]](#footnote-229) In this chapter, I explore how Suyin’s conceptions of identity are echoed in Anglophone Hong Kong writing that follows, as well as their effect on socio-political relations. First analysing the fictionality of ideations that underpin such constructs, I later develop a methodology that steers my narrative in a less aggressive direction.

In many ways, Suyin’s map of Hong Kong’s socio-political relations resembles Anderson’s nation: ‘imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship’.[[229]](#footnote-230) As foregrounded in the protagonists’ ‘troubled but harmonious, ill-fated and yet triumphant love affair[[230]](#footnote-231), Suyin builds Hong Kong as a space in which ‘barrier[s]’ caused by ‘race[,] social structure, hierarchies[,] customs and ... prejudices’,[[231]](#footnote-232) are overshadowed by a point of commonality: their “inbetween-ness”. Hong Kong is an anchor for this commonality, described ‘a rock of exile to so many; poised, expectant, waiting for the future, just as we were’.[[232]](#footnote-233) Anderson’s nation is conceived out of ‘an anthropological spirit’, ‘capable of being transplanted ... to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations’.[[233]](#footnote-234) As Suyin explores social networks, mapping the inequality and exploitation rife in the late-colonial society, an anthropological spirit intersects political and ideological divisions to produce a feeling of shared experience as a basis for group identity formation. What stands out in Suyin’s map is the importance of affect and the collective imagination for reinforcing attachments to and within Hong Kong.

**Mapping Socio-economics**

Suyin initially illuminates societal divisions by plotting spatial relationships between social demographics. Suyin’s narrator describes how ‘seldom is there such close proximity of squalor and wealth, misery and ostentation’.[[234]](#footnote-235) She presents this divide as the result of a burgeoning commodity culture, establishing a parallel between the ‘wide’, ‘crowded’ shopping streets of ‘goods in profusion [and] American things ... in great heaps on counters’, and the ‘narrow streets of the Chinese district [in which] abide the poor’, with overcrowded tenements, where ‘innumerable children ... play in the dust’.[[235]](#footnote-236) This parallel is magnified when Suyin maps the poor district using the same objective criteria and syntax used to judge commodities; ‘here are the street sleepers, ... here a family spreads a mat,... the streets are dirty, the houses smell ... few go to look at them’.[[236]](#footnote-237) Suyin pairs topographical details, comparing ‘lipsticks [that] glisten in their cases’ with ‘pails of excreta are placed outside door[s] for collection’, and rich stalls ‘drape[d]’ in ‘silks’, with poor balconies ‘draped’ in ‘washing’.[[237]](#footnote-238) Suyin links these divisions to the colonial, laissez-faire superstructure, echoing what she calls ‘the colony’s motto’; ‘You can buy anything here’,[[238]](#footnote-239) thus critiquing Hong Kong’s ‘modern ‘material’’socioeconomic environment’ that had arisen ‘in the wake of enterprising European traders, soldiers, administrators and missionaries who, by their superior material power, established themselves as rulers’ by literally mapping economic disparity. [[239]](#footnote-240)

However, in Suyin’s depictions of Hong Kong’s transforming economic and social environment, ‘the asymmetry between victims [and colonizer] in the victimized/colonized nation’ is complicated.[[240]](#footnote-241) Suyin’s narrative map reflects less distinct spatial boundaries amongst the affluent Chinese, British and American population. Given the uncertain future, citizens are united in their desire to make a ‘[q]uick-profit’.[[241]](#footnote-242) New transnational partnerships spring up between opportunists, and cause Suyin to reflect on new forms of exploitation *within* as well as between milieu. She reflects, for example, that as ‘Colonial Administration grinds on’, ‘it is the Chinese themselves who are hardest on their own people[;] [t]hey exploit their own underdogs as no Englishman would dare to do in 1950. Their only concern is to get rich quick’.[[242]](#footnote-243) While Suyin continues to use contrasting spaces to depict economic divisions, describing ‘squatters camps [that have] spread across the colony’ and ‘crouch at the doorstep of the hill-top mansions of the wealthy’, she hangs these divisions on other sociological factors such as mass migration from the mainland.[[243]](#footnote-244) She partially excuses the ‘Colonial Government’, which she writes, ‘[i]n its own imperfect, hesitating way, ... has given justice, fair dealing, conciliation and a sense of tolerance to Hongkong’.[[244]](#footnote-245) Suyin’s mapping thus encompasses a new dissolution of colonial hierarchies. She traces transnational interactions and exchanges, capturing the fluidity and constant evolution of Hong Kong’s power structures. As her character Nora points out; ‘[t]he way Suyin keeps up with business in Hong Kong ... is by watching the lobby of one hotel’, reimagining the hotel lobby as a ‘barometer of trade and financial weather’.[[245]](#footnote-246) Her protagonist, like Suyin herself, focuses on a single focal point of socio-economic relations. Suyin’s map thus resembles an early embodiment of Loomba’s economic model of globalisation, which, she argues, cannot be analysed using concepts like margins and centres and is better understood through ‘the dissolution of geographic and cultural borders and paradigms’.[[246]](#footnote-247) This new spatial model depicts globalisation and the laissez-faire economy as creating a more level platform for economic competition than that which previously existed at the peak of colonial governance. Suyin reflects, ‘who cares about a nation’s politics if one can trade with it? ‘We have never refused trade with anyone’ is the Hongkong businessman’s invariable comment’.[[247]](#footnote-248) Here, Suyin encapsulates her idea of an ‘invariable’ Hong Kong outlook that remains prevalent in subsequent Anglophone narratives: a desire to do business transnationally that overshadows national affiliations.

Suyin’s societal map therefore reflects an early manifestation of the power dynamics of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s model of contemporary globalisation: a ‘new international network’ that ‘establishes no territorial centre of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers’, but is instead organised by a collective subscription to super-ideologies.[[248]](#footnote-249) The super-ideology that governs Suyin’s society is a “Eurocentric” idea of value. This is epitomised in Suyin’s profile of a Chinese couple, Mr and Mrs. Kam, who are

justly proud of their home [having] painstakingly voyaged in ships, resided in grandiose and un-comfortable European and American hotels, acquiring expensively the best that Western knowledge of beauty offered [and] all that Western books and educated Westerners agreed in admiring.[[249]](#footnote-250)

Here, Suyin maps value, literally demarcating “Western” spaces to which the Kams physically travel to acquire products and experiences to which Westerners ascribe value. These value structures then operate *inside* the Hong Kong space, underpinning another layer of Suyin’s map that traces social relations; the Kams’ social status is elevated by their subscription to this idea that ‘Western’ is superior. This governing Eurocentricism is epitomised in Suyin’s multi-layered map of the shopping district, listing ‘American things ... [c]ameras, bathing suits, lipsticks, perfumes, watches, shoes, nylons’,[[250]](#footnote-251) Suyin positions these Western products as centres around which Chinese shoppers ‘crowd’ and ‘congregate’ and ‘eddy’.[[251]](#footnote-252) By mapping the circulation of Western goods and Eurocentric ideas of value within the Hong Kong space, Suyin’s novel embodies Loomba’s argument that ‘the colonies ... provided captive markets for European [and American] goods’,[[252]](#footnote-253) and demonstrates the evolution of Eurocentrism into an ideology that ‘propagat[es] its own ‘system of reference’’.[[253]](#footnote-254) While Eurocentrism results from ‘the comparative advantage gained by colonialism’[[254]](#footnote-255), in Suyin’s novel it continues to determine socio-economic relations in the laissez-faire, globalised climate, nurturing ‘the illusion of mutual benefit and the propagation of material aspiration’.[[255]](#footnote-256)

Suyin alludes to the essential “unreality” of this value system, embodied in ‘the ‘falsies’ spread on counters’[[256]](#footnote-257), an unreality completely overlooked by both the wealthy and the poor. While the poor are presented as ‘human scavengers that live off the refuse from the hotels’,[[257]](#footnote-258) literally dependent on refuse of the system that subjugates them, the wealthy are ideologically dependent on the same capitalist system and are similarly desperate. The ‘worries’ of ‘Old Master’ exemplify this felt dependency. He speculates,

[t]here was much quick-profit making ... but what of the future? It was not possible to say what would happen next year. The only thing to do was to make good profit and get away. But get away where?[[258]](#footnote-259)

Here, Old Master’s overlapping, incomplete questions convey the frantic search for stability, which, in Suyin’s Hong Kong, can only be found by subscribing to the system of value that underpins the economic structure, but which fuels further subjective discomfort. Suyin’s Hong Kong thus embodies what Antonio Callari describes as an economy that orders society through its ‘contruct[ion of] a homogenous space’ in which subjects ‘search for a principle (and theory) of value’.[[259]](#footnote-260) Suyin presents Hong Kong as a homogenous space in which individuals are united by a desire to rectify a shared notion of instability, regardless of demographic or nationality. This is epitomised in the following passage:

As beings from different planets, invisible to each other, unconscious and indifferent, these people move, walk side by side, jostle each other, sidle to avoid contact ... Absorbed in their preoccupation, aware only of their own perils and opportunities, riveted to their individual search for safety and survival, each is filled with the illusion of entireness. [[260]](#footnote-261)

By mapping the close physical proximity of individuals, Suyin depicts a shared goal: ‘safety and survival’. While this idea of ‘survival’ is economically relative, individuals share a felt ‘struggle for existence’ in their own sphere.[[261]](#footnote-262) In this way, Suyin represents Hong Kong as a space of common struggle, rather than a struggle between demographics, despite the imaginary nature of value structures that underpin it. I return to the role of imagination in identity construction later, but, first, I consider how Suyin maps individual identity against this backdrop.

**Locating Identity**

Like much Anglophone Hong Kong Writing of the 1950s and 60s, particularly that which falls within the genres of romance and memoir, Suyin depicts the felt binaries and subjective ‘schizophrenias’[[262]](#footnote-263) that result from transnational identities and inter-racial relationships. Richard Mason’s *The World of Suzie Wong* typifies these binaries. The protagonist’s artistic endeavour, to overcome colonial social divisions, leads him to Hong Kong’s Wanchai district, where he meets Suzie Wong. Characteristic of orientalist romance writing, Suzie is the ‘female embodiment of his desires’[[263]](#footnote-264) and becomes the subject of the protagonist’s art and narrative gaze. Reflecting, ‘I abandoned myself to this beguiling illusion’,[[264]](#footnote-265) Lomax presents himself as powerless before Suzie’s allure, positioning her as exotic temptress. Eventually, the two marry, typifying the ultimately triumphant colonial love affair, but not without foregrounding the socio-economic divisions that complicate their relationship for most of the novel. In this way, Mason’s narrative thematically echoes Suyin’s preoccupation with the ill-fated love affair and deep personal reflection, exemplified when her protagonist and Mark ‘loo[k] at each other, and then away, stirred by a new awareness of ourselves, and also a deep sadness […] [f]or we had begun something of which we could not know the end’.[[265]](#footnote-266) Here, Suyin’s protagonist seems to understand these racial and national divisions as an intrinsic barrier between herself and Mark, and a source of subjective disjuncture that cannot be reconciled. As her narrative progresses, however, the narrator’s subjective disjuncture becomes much more multi-layered and complex, sensitive not only to racial binaries but to increasingly fluid social politics specific to Hong Kong’s globalising moment.

Suyin’s societal and physical maps are inextricable from one another; while individual subjectivity is mapped onto the Hong Kong space, Suyin simultaneously embodies Hong Kong’s political instability and geographical “inbetween-ness” in these individual subjectivities. As Anne Whitehead argues, ‘individuals situate their [identities] ... [by] always receiv[ing] support from and refer[ing] back to material spaces’, seeking ‘stability’ in the ‘sense of permanence place can provide’.[[266]](#footnote-267) This sense of permanence, however, is distinctly missing in Suyin’s Hong Kong context, both in terms of Hong Kong’s geographical marginality on the edge of China, and the transnational roots of its migrant population. Suyin describes a ‘typical’ Hong Kong citizen, who ‘claim[s] as his origin a village back in South China, refusing to belong to the colony’, ‘even when he works [in Hong Kong] all his life, even when his children are born here, ... even when he is born here’.[[267]](#footnote-268) Suyin’s narrator epitomises these conflictions, evaluating her ‘Eurasianism’ and reflecting, ‘[i]t is rather frightening to be so many different people ... usually torn between at least two worlds’.[[268]](#footnote-269) As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue, ‘[s]elf-representation involves emplacements of multiple kinds’ where the ‘myth of self attach[es] to a geographical location’.[[269]](#footnote-270)

However, while Suyin alludes to a fragmented sense of self caused by multiple transnational affiliations, at the same time, it is this sense of geographical confusion and displacement that causes citizens to cling to their immediate locality of Hong Kong, a space which embodies this felt liminality and “inbetween-ness” and thus acquire a new shared Hong Kong identity. As Abbas argues, ‘ideas of movement, transition and liminality are found not only in personal biographies but also in the representations of Hong Kong as a place’.[[270]](#footnote-271) Ho writes that ‘the literary-cultural field of 1950s Hong Kong’ is ‘delimited largely in Cold War ideological terms’ and ‘cultural initiatives [to] build a better world for all’, the most prominent of these discourses being a ‘global agenda of cultural internationalism’.[[271]](#footnote-272) Hong Kong as a diasporic space embodies this internationalism, thus contributing to this feeling of shared refuge and attachment. Collectively, citizens are unable to ‘look at Hong Kong, where we are’, without looking ‘beyond at China which is the reason why we are here’,[[272]](#footnote-273) and yet this ‘reason’ unites them, both with each other and the Hong Kong space.

Though Suyin describes how ‘[e]ach man, despite his air of belonging’ is ‘a transient’, she collectivises the ‘anonymous common men of Hong Kong ... who come to regard themselves as on the way to somewhere else’.[[273]](#footnote-274) While Hong Kong is defined as a space in which ‘people come and go and know themselves more impermanent than anywhere else on earth’,[[274]](#footnote-275) Suyin’s use of the superlative gives Hong Kong a distinct identity, unlike anywhere else. Ironically, this feeling of transience becomes ‘the most permanent fact about the colony’,[[275]](#footnote-276) and can therefore be relied upon as an anchor during subject construction. In Suyin’s Hong Kong, the sense of permanence which Whitehead states individuals depend upon, is actually derived through *impermanence*. While somewhat paradoxical, Suyin’s Hong Kong thus exemplifies Seton-Watson’s idea of ‘nation’. He suggests that ‘a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation... or behave as if they formed one'.[[276]](#footnote-277) Though Suyin’s individuals display affinities with elsewhere and experience subjective dislocations, their habituation in Hong Kong makes them behave as a group; they form attachments to Hong Kong and to each other, constituting a distinct “Hong Kong identity”. While Ho writes, ‘[d]iaspora fractures the hegemonic claims of the nation upon identity formation, and diasporic communities have contributed to the deterritorializing of the nation’,[[277]](#footnote-278) in Suyin’s, it is this identity of diaspora that is central in building a distinct ‘local’ identity.

As Abbas writes, ‘the sense of the temporary is very strong, even if it can be entirely counterfactual’.[[278]](#footnote-279) Suyin represents this paradoxical idea of belonging through not-belonging, where a sense of stability is derived from subjective instability, in the recurring metaphor of Hong Kong as a ‘boat’ or ‘ship’. Early in the novel, Mark explains; ‘Hong Kong is a funny place; like a ship, and you never know what is going to happen to people in a ship’,[[279]](#footnote-280) establishing Hong Kong as both spatially and temporally inbetween, and the uncertainty this poses for subjects within this space. Suyin later develops this metaphor, describing the experience of Hong Kong as ‘like being on a boat that is capsizing’.[[280]](#footnote-281) Here, Suyin’s use of present continuous tense magnifies the sense of uncertainty; in this image, while Suyin feels that capsizing is imminent, the ship is suspended in the moment before. And yet, it is because of this future uncertainty that attachments to Hong Kong’s here and now are strengthened. Hong Kong is thus positioned as a momentary site of refuge in which citizens live as ‘sitters-on-the-fence’;[[281]](#footnote-282) an uncomfortable inbetween to which displaced individuals pin their subjectivities. Suyin’s metaphor is echoed in subsequent Anglophone novels, such as Preston Schoyer’s *The Typhoon’s Eye* (1959). Schoyer offers a kaleidoscope of American perspectives on Hong Kong that highlight the socio-economic upheaval caused by China’s communist revolution. The perspectives of his protagonists, Caroline Weitzel, the anti-communist philanthropist, and American business owner Reston who perceives colonial governance as Hong Kong’s main defence against communism, are supplemented with those of expatriate refugees from the mainland, journalists and opium addicts. While his characters differ in their socio-political perspectives, all are indicative of the anxiety and uncertainty that is rife among both locals and expatriates in this unsettled environment. However, like Suyin’s novel, Schoyer’s is set against a backdrop of temporary stagnation and a mood of “drifting”, epitomised in the novel’s title. Schoyer’s junk boat is a metaphor for Hong Kong subjectivity, while the typhoon’s eye, in which characters literally find themselves during a boating excursion, represents Hong Kong’s geo-political precariousness. This “storm” surrounds the colony, transforming it into a deeply unsettled refuge.[[282]](#footnote-283)

Suyin’s Hong Kong, offering ‘refug[e]’ to ‘bankers, businessmen, rich women, missionaries and squatters ... racketeers, the gangsters, the prostitutes, the running dogs, the fawning slaves, the exploiters of people, the spies and reactionaries and rejects of brave new China’, is a space in which disparate identities are overruled by their common position as ‘wanderers against [their] will’.[[283]](#footnote-284) Ronald Skeldon writes that historically Hong Kong has been ‘a place of exile with a population substantially made up of refugees from a communist system’ which has created ‘a substantial population that has only superficial roots in the territory’.[[284]](#footnote-285) However, ironically, it is this sojourner identity that underpins the sense of community in Suyin’s Hong Kong. It is this idea that Hong Kong identity, individual and collective, is derived from shared uncertainty that endures in contemporary English language Hong Kong writing, and underpins the “nation-like” identity of Hong Kong’s present. As I investigate the idea of present day collective consciousness, my study does not seek to homogenise the diverse range of perspectives that constitute the body of English language identity discourse, but instead to highlight common narrative methods of representing and responding to Hong Kong’s temporal inbetween-ness.

**“Nation-Building” Up To and Around 1997**

The imaginative processes that underpin Suyin’s picture of Hong Kong identity, such as socio-political and economic uncertainty, the search for an anchor for identity and emotional attachments to space, remain central throughout the eighties, in texts like Lee Ding Fai’s *Running Dog*, the nineties, in novels like Paul Theroux’s *Kowloon Tong*, and beyond, in writing such as Xu Xi’s *The Unwalled City*. This uncertainly is particularly prevalent in narratives concerned in some way with the 1997 handover. *Kowloon Tong* follows Bunt Mullard, a xenophobic, Hong Kong-born Englishman, as he struggles to defend his business against mainland businessman Hung, who he sees as a symbol of the impending Chinese takeover of Hong Kong.[[285]](#footnote-286) Writing after the handover, Xu Xi focuses on Hong Kong’s cosmopolitanism and aims to ground Hong Kong’s contemporary identity by weaving together narratives of local and international characters. Xu Xi foregrounds transnationalism in her central characters including American photographer, Vince De Luca, internationally educated Hong Kong women Andanna Lee and Gail. These characters remain personally conflicted and their narratives are characterised by instability.[[286]](#footnote-287) While Xu Xi’s novel is self-consciously progressive, seeking to move away from over-familiar East/West and China/Hong Kong binaries, Harshana Rambukwella describes how there is ‘little character or plot development resulting in a rather flat narrative structure which provides a somewhat static view of a set of intertwined lives’.[[287]](#footnote-288) This feeling of stasis cloaks the novel in the same sense of inbetween-ness and subjective stagnation of Suyin’s Hong Kong.

Suyin’s conflicting perspectives on globalisation as both a harbinger of economic and social mobility and a driving wedge in socio-economic divisions are echoed in Lee Ding Fai’s *Running Dog*. Lee explores the search for collective identity of the Chinese entrepreneurial class of the 1960’s amidst Hong Kong’s burgeoning laissez-faire capitalist economy. The narrative follows Lee’s protagonist, Yau Man, an illegal immigrant from Canton whose rejection of the dominant communist ideology of the mainland propels his economic pursuits in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is presented as a space of escape and opportunity, but always in relation to the bleak promises of the mainland, where he has been drafted to work in coal mines of the North. The narrator reflects: ‘[His] bleak outlook, together with romantic notions he had developed from novels he read … prompted him to act’.[[288]](#footnote-289) Yau Man’s narrative is punctuated with the stories of other characters who explore their identities in a globalised context, both mobilised by opportunity of international trade and travel, and restricted by their multiplicitous identities, and attachment to their Chinese culture.[[289]](#footnote-290) While, Lee’s picture of 1960’s Hong Kong is perhaps more optimistic than narratives of the 1950’s, like Coates’s *The Road*, Lee models subject construction as disorientating and unsettled. This unease grows as narratives look increasingly towards the end of colonial governance. Christopher New’s *The Chinese Box*, for example, explores socio-economic structures of a capitalist society in a city caught between colonial rule and repatriation. New’s narrative typifies those which, though highly critical of colonial governance, represent the impending Chinese take-over as much more of a threat to a Hong Kong way of life. While New’s narrator summarizes, ‘the fear that China might take over Hong Kong had gradually receded into the unvisited backs of people’s minds’,[[290]](#footnote-291) the idea still haunts subjectivities. The handover is frequently paired with apocalyptic imagery; the narrator continues, ‘we could even get used to the idea that the world was going to end next week’.[[291]](#footnote-292)It is this almost paradoxical combination of apathy and dread that gives New’s narrative its atmosphere of inbetween-ness and stagnation.

Increasingly in this period, Hong Kong-mainland binaries along with transnational binaries scaffold characters’ attempts to grapple with their identities. It is important now to consider how events such as the handover have influenced contemporary Anglophone representations of Hong Kong’s political and economic stability and positionality in the globalised present. I aim to expose the highly speculative and imaginative nature of many such ideations and anxieties with the hope of developing a more productive model for writing about Hong Kong. In the post-hand over era, ideas about Hong Kong’s relationship to globalisation have come almost full circle; from a source of identity renovation, growth and the development of a distinct identity, “the global” is now construed as its greatest threat. Due to increasing competition from megacities like Shanghai and Singapore, whereby, as politician Martin Lee outlines, ‘Hong Kong’s bargaining power’ has ‘diminish[ed] so fast’, it is no longer considered the global economic ‘powerhouse’ it once was.[[292]](#footnote-293) Increasing anxieties about assimilation and political intervention by the mainland are exacerbated by these fears about Hong Kong’s diminishing global economic prowess. Echoing Suyin’s sinking ship motif, contemporary writing about Hong Kong typically depicts the present moment in a way that resembles what Elleke Boehmer calls the ‘arrested fall, a so-called ‘frozen penultimate’.[[293]](#footnote-294) While Boehmer uses this term to refer to a temporal crisis in post-apartheid South African literature, this idea is illuminating in the Hong Kong context. Boehmer argues that a type of narrative paralysis is symptomatic of trauma when ‘systemic disorders ... cannot ... be smoothly processed into a renewed national imaginary’.[[294]](#footnote-295) As contemporary Anglophone writing attempts this renewal, in the form of ‘minority nationalism’, an atmosphere of crisis becomes prevalent. As writers depict a shared search for group ‘membership’ and for ‘an anchor for ... self-identification and the safety of effortless secure belonging’,[[295]](#footnote-296) ideations that support or threaten this search are exponentially magnified.

Lingering rhetoric from Hong Kong’s 1997 handover period continues to underpin subsequent narratives. While views surrounding the handover are by no means homogenous, it is illuminating to briefly explore a dominant binary propagated by much English language Hong Kong writing: the political demonisation of China and a corresponding idealisation of, or nostalgia for, the colonial past. Written against this backdrop, Xu Xi’s 2001 novel, *The Unwalled City* reflects the melodrama of the countdown to the “handover”, as the city faces an ‘inevitable’ Chinese future and mournfully contemplates ‘leav[ing] behind the memory of what it was’.[[296]](#footnote-297) As Xu Xi’s character Danny speculates, ‘once [Hong Kong] becomes China, it’ll just be a matter of pleasing the new ‘sovereign’’.[[297]](#footnote-298) Similarly, Paul Theroux’s *Kowloon Tong* embodies Eurocentric ideations of China as a political enemy and Britain as a “colonial guardian”. Bunt, who, despite being surrounded by reminders of his English heritage, has never been to England embodies a binary between idealisation of a colonial past and demonisation of China, a place he has also never visited. The narrator reflects, ‘[b]ecause [Bunt] had never been to China it seemed to him a place of darkness and ambush’,[[298]](#footnote-299) while Britain is also ‘a dim memory that could never be verified or revisited also having never been there’.[[299]](#footnote-300) And yet, Bunt’s Eurocentric prejudices cause him to overlook shortcomings of British colonial rule. Bunt’s subjective ideations of colonial versus Chinese governance of Hong Kong are evident when he tries to argue, ‘Hong Kong was doing perfectly well as a British colony’, and Hoyt sarcastically rebukes him; ‘Sure. No elections. No democracy’.[[300]](#footnote-301) Theroux highlights the inherent irony in Bunt’s binary depictions of British and Chinese governance when Bunt argues that ‘Hong Kong had surrendered without a fight’ and is, ‘letting China have its wicked way with her’,[[301]](#footnote-302) overlooking the exploitation of Hong Kong by the British.

This binary 1997 discourse embodies a phenomenon described by Kim Mikyoung and Barry Schwartz as “national memory”, which is ‘unreal or, at best, disputable, temporary and mutable’.[[302]](#footnote-303) Maurice Halbwachs offers a useful explanation of how this “memory” functions, arguing that ‘collective remembering is not only, or even primarily, concerned with preserving the past but rather with maintaining social cohesion and identity’.[[303]](#footnote-304) This “shared memory”, through which a collective identity can be derived, thus ‘“thrives in a society where large groups of people have already become alienated from common value; where separate universes of discourse are linked with reciprocal distrust”’.[[304]](#footnote-305) In the count down to 1997, identity discourse contends what Hong Kong will look like after the ‘symbolic’ “removal” of the organising super-structure of colonialism. As Xi’s character Danny speculates, ‘once [Hong Kong] becomes China, it’ll just be a matter of pleasing the new ‘sovereign’’.[[305]](#footnote-306) Danny’s rhetoric reflects notions of helplessness and of China’s ability to subsume Hong Kong. This discourse is fuelled by a social consciousness still reeling from the Tiananmen massacre of 1987 and mirrors increased rejection of the political narrative of the mainland.

These attitudes resurface around the 2014 Occupy Central movement. Discussing a cause of this unrest, Albert Ho describes Hong Kong citizens as ‘[having] a good memory about things that happened like the 1989 massacre and the cultural revolution’,[[306]](#footnote-307) which results in a fear of political intervention. While Skeldon describes ‘a tension between an attachment to China as the motherland and a fear of the communist state’,[[307]](#footnote-308) contemporary English language Hong Kong writing primarily emphasises the latter. This rejection of mainland identity is epitomised in a scene in *The Unwalled City*, where Colleen mocks Kwok Po’s feelings of attachment to China as a ‘“motherland”’, in favour of her own ‘scholar[ly]’ experience, a highly politicised ideation. When Colleen states, ‘I believe in remembering’, ironically, she rejects the subjective and experiential ‘memories’ of Kwok Po’s parents in favour of her own memories of watching reports of Tiananmen. This bias demonstrates the relativity of memory in the construction of Hong Kong identity, fuelling a distrust of Chinese politics and a ‘cultural divide’.[[308]](#footnote-309)

**Magnified Anxieties**

The imaginative processes that fuel pre-handover social politics have ironically accelerated post-1997 and continue to shape identity in the present. Critics like Kingsley Bolton have reflected on the anti-climactic nature of the handover, and the move into a period of no change for fifty years.[[309]](#footnote-310) However, the rapid changes to Hong Kong’s global status during the first half of this period have a profoundly unsettling effect on Hong Kong’s narrative consciousness. Wong and Tsoi contrast the picture of ‘1997, [when] cosmopolitan and prosperous Hong Kong was seen as China’s vital gateway to the outside world’, with the present situation, in which Hong Kong ‘is no longer the only jewel in China’s crown, with cities such as Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou becoming financial or manufacturing powerhouses’.[[310]](#footnote-311) Alongside this threat of globalisation, Westernized Hong Kong media sensationalises ‘perceived attempts by Beijing to exert influence’ over Hong Kong, particularly around the 2014 “Occupy Central” movement to defend Hong Kong’s autonomy.[[311]](#footnote-312) This notion of “threat” is illuminated in Louise Ho’s lines, ‘deadly dead lines kill/ They freeze the future/ Blocking free passage for the present’.[[312]](#footnote-313) While Ho is here referring to the official handover date, Hong Kong’s ’50 years of no change’ period effectively delays any changes that this official date promised or threatened. This new delayed but ever-present deadline of 2047 has the same haunting effect that Xu Xi outlines in her epigraph to *The Unwalled City,* citing Ho’s lines ‘There’s always something deadly/ About deadlines,/ They haunt before they occur’.[[313]](#footnote-314) While Abbas writes that Hong Kong’s ‘fear has proved largely unfounded as China has for the most part followed, as promised, a hands off policy towards Hong Kong, though there have been rumblings on issues like press freedom and so on’,[[314]](#footnote-315) during this suspension period anxieties about Hong Kong’s future to fester and escalate.

The threat of Chinese interference is echoed in everyday narratives, evident in the interviews I conducted in 2017 with Hong Kong residents. Conscious of my own positionality as non-native researcher and the subjectivity of my transcription and interpretation of these texts, I designed the questions to be as open as possible and refrained from influencing participants to speak positively or negatively of either Britain or China in their descriptions of Hong Kong identity, past, present or future.[[315]](#footnote-316) An underlying anxiety is evident as interview participants discuss their hope for Hong Kong’s future. For example, despite professing, ‘there’s still ... a lot of hope ... a lot of people are standing up for themselves’,[[316]](#footnote-317) interviewee Nicholas’s use of the term ‘still’ alludes to a sustained struggle, and, though he concludes, ‘I don’t really know the exact future but it’s not too negative, not too pessimistic’,[[317]](#footnote-318) via negativa taints his professed optimism.Even Olivia, the most optimistic of interviewees, falters as she tries to justify her prediction that the future will be ‘great’. She argues,

Because… actually we can’t see in the future, any plans that we… we can’t know, we don’t know about the future, we don’t have a big picture about what will happen, because… from 1997 we think that there is going to be another fifty years will be the same and everything is remaining unchanged but for only twenty years about I can see that there is lots of things are changing.[[318]](#footnote-319)

Unable to complete her clause that begins, ‘because…’, she then uncovers layers of uncertainty that cloud her image of a ‘great ... future’; ‘we can’t see’, ‘we can’t know’, ‘we don’t have a big picture’, leaving the question, ‘what does Hong Kong’s future look like?’ ominously unanswered. Olivia anchors her concerns around 1997 and the ambiguous ‘fifty year’ present, an official “no change” period but which is undermined by the visible, or at least perceived, change that has already taken place in the past twenty years. As these short extracts illustrate, the present speculative atmosphere produces identity narratives that are fraught with anxiety.

I turn now to the ideations that underpin this anxiety, again using ‘ideation’ to indicate an idea of place and identity that is produced and guided as much by shared imaginative processes as by observable realities. I do so in order to outline a methodological approach to the writing of a Hong Kong narrative that steers away from a fixation on uncertainty and threat.

**Demonisation of China**

The strength of this collective imagination is illuminated by Holloway and Jefferson’s work on ‘The Risk Society in an Age of Anxiety’.[[319]](#footnote-320) As Jørgensen and Phillips outline, ‘certain psychological forces create a universal desire for security [which causes] people [to] invest in certain discourses ... in order to cope with the proliferation of risk in late modernity’.[[320]](#footnote-321) The ideation of China reflects such an investment. Lee explains that ‘a sense of Hong Kong citizenship is constructed on a relationship of hierarchy and domination with the mainland others’.[[321]](#footnote-322) Wu explains the origins of this relationship:

[I]n the 1980’s, China’s open door policy brought about the influx of capital from Hong Kong. The difference in economic power between the two places started a relationship of economic domination and subordination. Meanwhile Hong Kong’s cultural and entertainment industries continued to massively invade the mainland and deluge southeast China. What was promoted and sold to the mainlanders was the ... superiority of “Hongkongness”. Significant cultural markers included language, vocabularies, clothing, behaviour, attitudes, cultural tastes, and habits. Conversely, ... mainlanders were increasingly deemed inferior and less sophisticated.[[322]](#footnote-323)

The perceived threat to Hong Kong’s economic prowess, political autonomy, and distinct identity triggers a resurgence in the narrative of Hong Kong’s superiority.(see also Elaine Yee Lin Ho[[323]](#footnote-324)) This binary rhetoric is also fuelled by ‘the discourse of in-betweenness’, often used to characterise Hong Kong, but which Hung argues is ‘simply a form of self-victimisation that complements the project of constructing the Self-Other relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China’.[[324]](#footnote-325) The affective weight of these discourses is reflected in my interviews. A statement by Hong Kong student activist, Meghan, encapsulated recurrent themes of fear of political intervention and reactionary resistance, explaining, ‘everyone is try[ing] to fight for their democracy against the Chinese monitoring government. ... they want to fight for their freedom ... but there are a lot of obstacles on this path’.[[325]](#footnote-326) While Meghan is the most politically explicit testimony, this sentiment underpinned many other depictions of the relationship between Hong Kong and China. Interviews were saturated with references to surveillance, Chinese military violence and “brainwashing”.

While this anti-mainland rhetoric hangs on political issues such as ‘Article 23’, the 2010 ‘issue of nationalist education’,[[326]](#footnote-327) the decision to vet the candidates for Hong Kong’s 2017 election that triggered the 2014 Umbrella Movement protests, it is magnified by an equal amount of paranoia and speculation. Edward Chin, Convenor of the ‘Occupy Central’ Finance Group, encapsulates this speculation when he argues that ‘[t]he communist party also exerts a type of *imperceptible* influence on Hong Kong ... controlled by what is called the ‘*invisible* hand’ from the CCP [my emphasis]’, denoting *feelings* of change which do not necessarily correlate with a physical reality.[[327]](#footnote-328) However, despite the highly speculative, imaginative nature of such ideations, they are positioned as an anchor for identity in English Language discourse. This is illuminated in my interviews as the idea of a threat to the Hong Kong identity seemed to strengthen interviewees’ attachments. For example, Meghan’s insistence on ‘fight[ing] for freedom’ exemplifies a profound attachment to the idea of democratic values as central in a Hong Kong way of life. This reaffirmed attachment to Hong Kong is also played out in discussions of China’s increasing demand for Putonghua proficiency in Hong Kong schools, and the Education Bureau’s 2014 announcement that ‘Cantonese was a "Chinese dialect that is not an official language" for which the bureau was forced to apologise and delete.[[328]](#footnote-329) My interviewee, Clair, discusses her theory:

China ... want[s] the students and us to be more comparable to the standard in China. ... they don’t want us to be so good in English because they are much lower. ... And then we are not… it doesn’t feel like we are more superior to them. They will be balance out and then there will be no longer any advantage over the Chinese.[[329]](#footnote-330)

Clair’s positioning of Hong Kong as ‘superior’ in English capabilities to the Chinese mainland reinforces an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ binary, magnified by the idea of China as manipulative and resentful. Cementing this binary, Clair defensively reasserts her affiliation with Hong Kong identity. By demonising China, Hong Kong residents construct what Holloway and Jefferson call, ‘a risk that has a clear source’, which provides ‘a course of action in which they themselves can engage’,[[330]](#footnote-331) an active discursive resistance.

Discussions of Hong Kong’s relationship to the mainland echoe Kymlicka and Straehle’s ‘minority nationalism’, where Hong Kong is imagined as a ‘territorially-concentrated’, ‘ethnocultural grou[p]’, which ‘[c]onfronted with state nationalism, ... resist[s] pressure to assimilate into the majority nation’.[[331]](#footnote-332) This minority identity is encapsulated in Skeldon’s description of Hong Kong as a ‘people of uncertain identity who unquestionably feel that they are Chinese, but not the Chinese of China’.[[332]](#footnote-333) While on one hand this ‘minority nation’ idea provides a clear source of identity for Hong Kong people, it also fuels discrimination towards mainlanders that the Hong Kong government has acknowledged as ‘analogous to race discrimination’.[[333]](#footnote-334) While, as Wu explains, the term ‘racism’ is unusual in the Hong Kong/China context since Hong Kong has ‘close historical and cultural ties’ with the mainland, and a ‘migrant society whose Chinese population originally came from various parts of China’, it is useful to illustrate the perniciousness of contemporary ideological divides.[[334]](#footnote-335)

In my interviews, this term ‘race’ was used in relation to discussions about the contentious issue of parallel trading. Rachel describes Hong Kong people’s reaction to the ‘suitcases’ of Chinese vendors on ‘the mainland train’, meaning the East Rail line that connects the New Territories with the mainland. Used to transport goods purchased cheaply in Hong Kong back into China, avoiding tariffs, suitcases have become a symbol of the perceived damaging impact of mainland on Hong Kong. Rachel discusses these suitcases as though they are racial signifiers, distinctive identifiers of “otherness” and threat, triggering what she deemed ‘racist’ responses.[[335]](#footnote-336) The use of this term ‘racism’ is demonstrative of the tribalism that can result from nation-building rhetoric, where an idea of belonging to a particular social group may override shared racial heritage. As Hobsbawm discusses, ‘very few modern national movements are actually based on a strong ethnic consciousness, though they often invent one once they have got going, in the form of racism’.[[336]](#footnote-337) This racism, explains Anderson, ‘dreams of eternal contaminations’.[[337]](#footnote-338) He argues that these forms of racism ‘manifest themselves, not across national boundaries, but within them ... as domestic repression and domination’.[[338]](#footnote-339) Rachel then embodies the parallel “identity affirming” effect of this racism; though she herself is an immigrant in Hong Kong she admits ‘we all kind of joined in as well’.[[339]](#footnote-340) Whilst early on in the interview Rachel displays limited attachment to Hong Kong, critical of its landscape, describing a ‘dirty, dirty ... concrete jungle ... with a few trees in-between’, after discussing her participation in discrimination she displays a new attachment to Hong Kong, describing the damaging and disruptive impact of “Chinese” infrastructure on Hong Kong’s beautiful landscape.[[340]](#footnote-341) By “joining in” with negative ideations of China, Rachel’s attachment to Hong Kong increases, fuelling further negative sentiment. This cyclical process is crucial when illustrating the damaging tribalism that can be fuelled by Hong Kong versus China binaries.

**“Remembering” a Colonial Past**

Tribal identity discourse is also fuelled by an equally constructed “memory” of the colonial past. Wu discusses what Chen Kuan-hsing calls Hong Kong’s ‘‘colonial cultural imaginary’’ in which ‘subjects constantly identify themselves with the knowledge and structures of neo-colonial domination’.[[341]](#footnote-342) Across my interviews, pre-1997 Hong Kong is construed almost homogeneously as better than the present. Despite being too young to remember British governance, Hong Kong citizen, Annie, insists that ‘[b]efore 1997 is still under England is better. More happy … [My parents] can earn more money [but] now Hong Kong many people under the money questions’.[[342]](#footnote-343) In addition to better economic prosperity, other participants discuss greater social mobility, community spirit, and political fairness in the past. While these ideations may reflect simple nostalgia, this nostalgia is paired with statements of dissatisfaction with the present political landscape. Participants linked this perceived better standard of living to rhetoric about a benevolent colonial government, ‘more focussed on the living of the people’.[[343]](#footnote-344)

This idealisation of Hong Kong under British rule embodies Kim and Schwartz’s idea that ‘different elements of the past become more or less relevant as [present] circumstances change ... including political, economic and ideological predicaments’.[[344]](#footnote-345) Present perceptions of threat from the mainland, magnify the idealisation of a British past, which in turn fuels the demonisation of Chinese politics in the present. In an interview following the 2014 Occupy protests, Benny Mok exemplifies this polarised rhetoric. Discussing his opposition to the 2014 proposed reforms to Hong Kong’s electoral system, he explains, ‘[a]lthough we were a colony, there were elections in the UK, it is a democratic country, it wouldn’t be too irresponsible towards its colonies, their citizens would take action’.[[345]](#footnote-346) Mok’s description of a Hong Kong ‘memory’ embodies Kim and Schwartz’s idea that ‘collective memory’ is ‘animated by cultural values that supply standards and frames of reference for the present’.[[346]](#footnote-347) The favourable perception of colonialism embodies Boaventura de Souza Santos’s model of ‘‘abyssal thinking’’, a binary system where one side of the line ‘is associated with the paradigm of regulation/emancipation and the ‘the other side’ with appropriation and violence’.[[347]](#footnote-348) This binary mentality is evident in a slogan that Ben Hedges identifies when discussing anti-Chinese sentiment at the 15th anniversary of the handover: “The Queen made us Pearl of the Orient. The Party ruined it”.[[348]](#footnote-349) Here, the synecdoches of ‘Queen’ and ‘party’ are used to signify the oppositional models of British and Chinese governance, demonstrating the reductive nature of these ideations in relation to which a Hong Kong is positioned.

Mok’s statement aligns democratic values with British governance and suggests that these values are truer to Hong Kong’s identity than Chinese communism. Here, he exemplifies a narrative method identified by Pietrzak-Franger, Pleβke and Voigts in their discussion of the identity construction of present-day cities. Where defining the ‘‘real’’ identity of a city involves ‘physically or imaginatively … retaining, reviving or reconstructing an older version of the city that seems ‘truer' to its ... character’.[[349]](#footnote-350) This construction of Hong Kong as democratic and opposite to the mainland rests upon what Jørgensen and Phillips call ‘chains of equivalence’, where words and ideas, presented as synonymous, can be used to ‘ma[p] the social space [and] individual and collective identit[y]’ construction.[[350]](#footnote-351) These equivalences are evident in depictions of the West and Western-ness in Anglophone Hong Kong writing. Anson Au writes:

Western foreigners are lauded as superior ... descendants of a world praised in our homage to Hong Kong’s colonial origins – a hymn that gains strength in the contemporary calls for the United Kingdom to intervene in favour of Hong Kong independence. ... A white-skinned instructor or tutor gives the impression of being able to provide a better education.[[351]](#footnote-352)

The idealisation of “Westernness” or Britishness on Hong Kong identity formation is evident in the cultural insistence on correct social etiquette. In my interviews, gestures such as queuing and holding doors open are used to characterise “Western” behaviour, and also as a behavioural signifier of difference Hong Kong and mainland culture. As interview participant Clair explains, ‘[Westerners] are all very nice, very polite and they have a certain culture ... they will line up and just trivial things like when you go in a lift, you press the button or hold the door for somebody’.[[352]](#footnote-353) Clair’s discussion of these behaviours demonstrates Whitehead’s idea that ‘codes of bodily etiquette preserve and pass on the memory of certain values and behaviours that the group holds to be important’.[[353]](#footnote-354) Multiple interview participants echo this sentiment, explicitly stating that mainlanders 'don’t want to line up’ and are ‘impolite’.[[354]](#footnote-355) This insistence on “correct” or “civilised” behaviour demonstrates the ongoing presence of colonial value structures in Hong Kong identity construction.

When Xu Xi writes that Hong Kong’s value system ‘suggest[s] an unwillingness to forget who we have been or who we *thought* we were [my emphasis]’[[355]](#footnote-356), her allusion to thought as opposed to fact is crucial. The above imaginative constructs of Britishness or “Western-ness”, mainland Chinese culture and politics, and Hong Kong’s relationship to these narratives, though skewed by present anxieties and even fictional, are central in much contemporary English language Hong Kong identity discourse. In the following section, I discuss in more detail how specific narrative methods of constructing Hong Kong identity in this speculative climate further marginalise Hong Kong. As Hong Kong decides its present identity, English language discourse embodies Hodgkin and Radstone’s argument that ‘cultural memory ... draws on countless scraps and bits of knowledge and information from the surrounding culture [which then] is inserted into larger cultural narratives’.[[356]](#footnote-357) In the case of Hong Kong English language discourse, however, these scraps are selected, discussed and strung together in a reductive manner that a) foregrounds the master narratives that Hong Kong resists, and b) fixes Hong Kong to an identity of struggle.

**An (In)dependent “Nation”**

Feeling that assimilation is ‘inevitable’,[[357]](#footnote-358) as well as pressures of globalisation and diminishing economic prowess, as Xu Xi writes, ‘‘the tenuous nature of Hong Kong’s existence’ is an increasingly central theme’,[[358]](#footnote-359) triggering the intense and imaginative reworking of Hong Kong identity that Ingham calls a fixation on the ‘here and now’.[[359]](#footnote-360) Szeman’s analysis of the present-day Canadian identity construction is illuminating in this context. Szeman identifies ‘anxiety over the tenuous existence of the Canadian nation’ in response to ‘physical proximity and cultural similarities’ between Canada and the United States and a fear of ‘the encroachment of Americanization cum modernity’, which mirrors Hong Kong’s defensive identity construction. Discussing a type of Canadian ‘nation-building’ triggered by anxieties about loss of identity and uncertainty, Szeman writes,

the nation in the decolonizing world is ... seen as a sign of independence, that is, as an enclosed space (geographically, politically, culturally) that modernity cannot easily penetrate, a specific place (or places) as opposed to abstract ones (or nonplaces) increasingly produced by modernity.[[360]](#footnote-361)

These master narratives, writes Szeman, had to be ‘resisted at all costs to preserve what was specifically Canadian, even if what this might be was only to be decided in the very process of resistance’.[[361]](#footnote-362) In Hong Kong’s case, however, defining this specific identity is complicated by the territory’s ‘tenuous beginnings’,[[362]](#footnote-363) and by its ‘present position as a world financial centre where international routes interweave on a daily basis’,[[363]](#footnote-364) allude to routes of trade, ideologies, languages and cultures. As Hong Kong identity is constructed in this climate, narratives reflect a struggle between a desire to assert a distinctly “local” identity and to celebrate Hong Kong’s prowess as a world city. While these two ideas are not necessarily oppositional, the narrative ways in which internationality and Hong Kong’s relationship to the “elsewhere” are typically constructed have produced an image on Hong Kong as fundamentally dependent, indistinct, and struggling.

1. **Foregrounding Elsewhere**

A central theme in Hong Kong English language writing is the assertion of Hong Kong’s superlative internationality, in reference to its multicultural population, tourism industry and transnational commercial environment. This focus is used as a means of enforcing the city’s distinction from a perceived homogenous mainland identity and evidencing the city’s uniqueness. As Ho states, ‘[o]ur land and space must mean very different things ... from what they mean generally, as both are densely compacted into an international ... community that is constantly changing and endlessly varied’.[[364]](#footnote-365) In response to this image of the city she hopes that the ‘globalised financial centre ... with its many contradictions and anomalies[,] may yet be tamed by writing [a]nd, in process of which, may arrive at a more definite sense of identity’.[[365]](#footnote-366)

This trope of Hong Kong as kaleidoscopic cosmopolis has been emergent in popular genres, particularly crime writing and espionage, since the 1980s. Transcultural encounters, international trade routes and socio-cultural clashes have formed the textural backdrop to novels like Keith Colquhoun’s *Filthy Rich* (1982), which depicts Hong Kong as a space of capitalist corruption,[[366]](#footnote-367) Marshall Browne’s *City of Masks* (1981), in which ‘[a]cts of violence, vice corruption, larceny, all sluiced through the fabric of its life’,[[367]](#footnote-368) and William Alan’s *Hong Kong Nemesis* (1992), which juxtaposes reductive representations of Hong Kong, Macanese, Cantonese and pan-Western cultures as his plot pivots around an international drug trade.[[368]](#footnote-369) While such texts are less concerned with defining the city’s identity than with exploring its internationality as a convenient backdrop for criminal activity, against such a backdrop, Ho identifies texts like Clavell’s *Noble House* (1981) that do ‘appear to offer something that is really and authentically Hong Kong’.[[369]](#footnote-370) Magnified towards and after the handover, this search for “authenticity” has shifted the trajectory of Hong Kong writing away from static socio-political and economic binaries and “hybridity” to a focus on more fluid international networks of identity and culture. As Hong Kong Anglophone writing seeks increasingly to define a unique Hong Kong identity, the trope is epitomised in contemporary texts such as Xu Xi’s *The Unwalled City*, where the local is defined not only by, but *as*, the international.

My 2017 interview participants demonstrate this ongoing effort to define Hong Kong by focussing on internationality. They described Hong Kong as offering ‘all the things ... from other countries’[[370]](#footnote-371), hosting an international population, and hailed globally as an ‘international paradise’.[[371]](#footnote-372) The space is thus presented as a ‘complicated ... mixture’[[372]](#footnote-373), ‘meeting point’ or ‘clash’ of Western and Chinese culture,[[373]](#footnote-374) both the natural result of globalisation, colonialism and Chinese heritage, and also a deliberate move by Hong Kong authorities towards transculturation.[[374]](#footnote-375) On one hand, this foregrounded internationality works to distance Hong Kong from China’s hegemonic politics and nationalist rhetoric and reinforce attachments to a distinctly Hong Kong identity; interviewee Danielle, for example, refers to Hong Kong’s internationality as a reason to identify as ‘purely a ‘Hong Kong people’ as opposed to ‘Chinese’’.[[375]](#footnote-376)

However, these interviews also illustrate an adverse effect of this narrative trope of cosmopolitanism, where an intense focus on Hong Kong’s internationality and transculturation actually minimises the narrative space for a discussion about anything distinctly local. Abbas describes this phenomenon in late colonial Hong Kong, discussing how colonial capitalism took the place of a local Hong Kong cultural identity until as late as the seventies, where

the import mentality saw culture, like everything else, as that which came from elsewhere: from Chinese tradition, more legitimately located in mainland China and Taiwan, or from the West.[[376]](#footnote-377)

He calls this effect a ‘reverse hallucination’. He writes, ‘if hallucination means seeing ghosts and apparitions, that is, something that is not there, reverse hallucination means not seeing what is there’.[[377]](#footnote-378) While Abbas suggests that the end of colonial governance brought about a change in Hong Kong’s status as a ‘cultural desert’,[[378]](#footnote-379) this notion of absence remains evident in contemporary Hong Kong discourse. As my interview participant Olivia summarises, ‘Hong Kong is mixed features, mixed style’, concluding, ‘actually I don’t think there is anything that can represent Hong Kong; everything can’.[[379]](#footnote-380) The resounding feeling across my interviews is that Hong Kong culture is either “disappearing”, difficult to ‘find’,[[380]](#footnote-381) or ‘not special’.[[381]](#footnote-382) This idea is encapsulated in a metaphor used by my interview participant Joshua, who describes Hong Kong as a ‘melting pot of cultures’.[[382]](#footnote-383) In this image, Hong Kong is essentially the pot, filled and swamped by foreign elements. While internationality is used to assert Hong Kong’s local identity, when internationality is taken as the key source of Hong Kong’s identity, ideas of local “essentiality” effectively disappear. Paul Theroux encapsulates this image of Hong Kong in *Kowloon Tong* when he describes it as ‘just an accumulation of worn or out-of-date things, like a massive attic’,[[383]](#footnote-384) and calling its flag a ‘bright, sterile hybrid’’.[[384]](#footnote-385)

This discursive effect is highlighted in Xu Xi’s Hong Kong novel, *The Unwalled City*, in which she pursues the ‘real Hong Kong’.[[385]](#footnote-386)

[Xu Xi] fill[s] her novels with ethnic Chinese and other people who have ties to China and Asia, but are ... ‘globalized’, the way the city was and is in its colonial, neo-colonial, financial centre, multinational-business influenced, international trade dominated, Hong Kong Chinese fashion.[[386]](#footnote-387)

As this description exemplifies, Hong Kong is situated in a way that ‘focuses on Hong Kong’s own direct relationship and interaction with the wider world’.[[387]](#footnote-388) Whilst Jason Eng Hun Lee argues that Xi’s treatment of both the ‘local and cosmopolitan’[[388]](#footnote-389) aspects of Hong Kong’s identity facilitates the ‘renewal of Hong Kong as a centre ... emphasis[ing] its geographical rootedness, but with an outward focus’,[[389]](#footnote-390) this outward focus has a tendency to overshadow the local. Xi identifies this paradox as a ‘central creative problem’,[[390]](#footnote-391) where the need to acknowledge and celebrate Hong Kong’s internationality might trigger the “disappearance” of a local identity.[[391]](#footnote-392) Here, she echoes Abbas’s key concern in *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*.[[392]](#footnote-393)

1. **An Identity of Struggle**

In this anxious climate, such narratives concerned with disappearance are increasingly defensive and territorial. The compulsion to assert Hong Kong’s identity is epitomised in Louise Ho’s positioning Hong Kong as at a ‘self-defining dawn’[[393]](#footnote-394) and when Ingham describes Hong Kong identity discourse as ‘defiant because of its tenuous beginnings’.[[394]](#footnote-395) However, this asserted need to construct ‘an aboriginality of one’s own making’[[395]](#footnote-396) both emphasises the inherent fictionality of ideas that underpin it, and fix Hong Kong to an identity of struggle and threat. Alex Lo calls this aggressive territorialism Hong Kong ‘exceptionalism’, defined as the belief that Hong Kong people ‘must preserve and protect what is unique and different about us against mainland contamination’,[[396]](#footnote-397) and from the homogenising threat of globalism.

While, as Jørgensen and Phillips explain, ‘discourses, identities or social space[s] are always established relationally, in relation to something they are not’,[[397]](#footnote-398) Hong Kong English language discourse is preoccupied with this relationality; emphasising comparisons, influences, dependencies and threats, Hong Kong’s identity becomes *defined by* this relationality and, consequently, by the ‘elsewhere’ it is pitched against. Though Ingham argues that ‘this ‘we’ is aware of the eternal dialectic but knows where it stands ... seek[ing] to sing new their own (our) ditties rather than yours’,[[398]](#footnote-399) the narrativisation of this search is, paradoxically, a song of “elsewhere” narratives. Furthermore, competitive language foregrounds underlying anxieties about the impending disappearance of Hong Kong’s identity. Leung’s poem ‘Leaf on the Edge’ exemplifies this effect, representing Hong Kong as a ‘marginal leaf’, which, despite ‘challeng[ing]’ oppressive ‘regimes’, makes only sparing ‘solemn appearances’, and represents Hong Kong’s voice as a ‘hidden song [that] needs other listening’.[[399]](#footnote-400) Leung asserts this ‘need’ again, explaining ‘[w]e need a fresh angle, / nothing added, nothing taken away / always at the edge of things or between places’.[[400]](#footnote-401) This focus on the need to resist dominant narratives, however, discursively positions Hong Kong as subordinate to these narratives; as Boehmer argues in her analysis of national “crisis” literature, ‘to write of new ways of dying in nonetheless to write of death’.[[401]](#footnote-402) This lexis of struggle adversely reaffirms Hong Kong’s marginality.[[402]](#footnote-403)

**Non-Identity**

The idea of ‘placelessness’[[403]](#footnote-404) has been present in narratives of Hong Kong since Han Suyin. Suyin, for example, describes Hong Kong as ‘a little gap, a slip of comet, small interstice stretched between fixed stars, come-and-go rock where I might sit, a few weeks, a few months, enough time to perhaps find a way out’.[[404]](#footnote-405) Abbas describes Hong Kong as ‘being neither here nor there’, calling it ‘not so much a place as a space of transit’ and ‘a port in the most literal sense – a doorway, a point in between’.[[405]](#footnote-406) The culmination of this defensive Hong Kong identity construction is what Szeman calls a ‘nonidentity’, produced through ‘an attempt to create the nation negatively, that is, through an appeal to what other nations [are] not’.[[406]](#footnote-407) This non-identity is alluded to when Ho writes; ‘We are […/] Kept afloat by our own energy’, defiantly claiming; ‘We have no site / Nowhere to land / No domicile’. In such writing, Hong Kong remains a ‘floating island’, unable to ground itself in a distinct identity.[[407]](#footnote-408) This discursive process is epitomised when Leung writes ‘We’d rather not blend/neither of us in love with flags or fireworks’,[[408]](#footnote-409) where his emphatic rejection of these synecdoches leaves no space for a discussion of what Hong Kong is instead.

While many local writers seek to ‘free’ Hong Kong’ from the master narratives of ‘Chinese Nationalism, British colonialism, and globalism’,[[409]](#footnote-410) they discursively emphasise or reproduce the dependency of Hong Kong’s identity on these narratives. When Ho describes this ‘celebrat[ion of] a fresh language and a fresh people’ as ‘the frightening duty *owed* [my emphasis]’ to Hong Kong,[[410]](#footnote-411) quoting Derek Walcott’s 1992 Nobel Prize lecture, she paradoxically reinforces the idea of Hong Kong’s fresh identity as dependent on the “elsewhere” (China and/or Britain) that *owes* Hong Kong its independence. This idea is alluded to when Lee discusses Hong Kong’s symbolic predicament after 1997. Lee writes,

essentially, the formal ending of colonial rule brought about a process of recolonization only. What is more, as Chow (1995) characterises, Hong Kong was politically stuck between the two colonizers – the outgoing colonial power and the incoming authoritarian regime.[[411]](#footnote-412)

This paralysis continues to underpin present Anglophone Hong Kong writing as it portrays the city’s entrapment between ‘the patriotic rhetoric of China and the moral rhetoric of Britain (in claiming that it had the moral responsibility to take care of the interests of its colonial subjects)’,[[412]](#footnote-413) and other transnational competition. Lee concludes that ‘attempts by Hong Kong people to have an independent voice’ remain ‘los[t]’, ‘silenced by Britain and China’ both politically and through current narrative formulae.[[413]](#footnote-414)

The failure of attempts to construct Hong Kong as a purely autonomous and ideologically independent ‘minority nation’, is a reflection of the collapse of ‘nation’ more generally. Lim Jie-hyun describes the “modern nation” as a paradox, since ‘[n]ationalist imagination can be fed only in transnational space’.[[414]](#footnote-415) ‘Individual[ity]’, writes Whitehead, ‘represents ... a paradoxical formulation, because [the concept] itself collapses once [the subject] enter[s] into a state of isolation’.[[415]](#footnote-416) For this reason, when Hong Kong English language writers use territorial “nation-building” rhetoric, they succeed only in highlighting its impossibility. Ernest Gellner’s 1972 argument that ‘nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist’,[[416]](#footnote-417) remains illuminative today. As Miwon Kwon argues, ‘values like originality, authenticity, and singularity are also reworked … reinforcing a general cultural valorization of places as the locus of authentic experience and coherent sense of historical and personal identity’.[[417]](#footnote-418) However, in the place-building works Kwon describes, the transforming city is concerned with the ‘restoration of a sense of belonging to an authentic local identity, which is actually artificial and far from the reality’.[[418]](#footnote-419) While Anderson’s nation is by definition ‘imaginary’,[[419]](#footnote-420) the increased implausibility of “nation” in the cosmopolitan present makes defensive nation-building even more dubious and burdened with a sense of its own intangibility. Though commanding the emotional attachment of Anderson’s nation, this imaginary Hong Kong is depicted as a simile of “nation”; a “nation-like space”. Always undermined by dependency on global networks, this space is burdened with its own intangibility.

I have argued thus far that attempts to concretise a ‘real’ Hong Kong identity only magnify a narrative atmosphere of instability. The Hong Kong identity represented in such texts is always dependent on other master narratives that overshadow or contradict it. In the remainder of this study, I theorise that *accepting* rather than seeking to counteract the fictionality of narratives of place can minimise the felt need for territorial defensiveness and the discursive effect of foregrounding elsewhere instead of the local. This is the basis of my “narrative state” model. Drawing on Suyin’s multi-layered mapping, my own creative narrative maps chains of equivalence, emplacements and social relations, highlighting how ideations influence identity construction and emphasising the fictionality and subjectivity of these ideations. I draw attention to this parallel fictionality but affective weight of these equivalences, for example, when my protagonist, Anna, remembers a colleague telling her, ‘‘[t]hey think you’re from the mainland if you cut in the line’’. Despite Anna’s very visible non-Chinese appearance and the obvious constructedness of such a signifier, I present Anna’s deep concern with avoiding this behaviour.[[420]](#footnote-421) She later internalises this equivalence, joining a queue and reflecting, ‘[M]ainlanders ignore it’. However, forcing herself to confront this ideation she then consciously contradicts her own stereotyping, adding, ‘and so does everybody else’.[[421]](#footnote-422) Explicitly foregrounding how these fictional constructs might operate, I hope to minimise the possibility of my writing fuelling socio-political divisions, and steer clear of echoing assertive, defensive, and polarising narratives that insist on defining a ‘real’ or ‘true’ Hong Kong. My resistance to territorial writing also steers away from a focus on Hong Kong’s relationship with (read: opposition to, dependency on, difference from) elsewhere. In the following chapter, I explore how other writers have used nation-building methods in less aggressive ways, and where these narrative practises have influenced my own creative practice.

**Chapter 2: “Whose City?”: Memory, Imagination, and Marginality**

*At our table, people were discussing the present political climate, and worrying that recent events might mean tighter restrictions, in which case ... all the progress that’s been achieved could be reversed. ... I remembered how, one evening when we were overseas, you started talking about ... new ways of seeing things, about how futile it was to try and bring fantasy down to earth, about how introspection had the power to open up a new reality. ... Your sensitive probing of language has influenced our faith in the words we habitually use. ... Your efforts came to nothing but that doesn’t mean that your personal emotions and the chaotic world of the subconscious can just be brushed out of the way, to create a tidy, well-ordered world. ... If you weren’t there, things would be incomplete*.

– Leung Ping-kwan, ‘Islands and Continents’, in *Islands and Continents*.[[422]](#footnote-423)

**Rewriting Hong Kong**

Much popularist Anglophone Hong Kong writing since the 1950s has treated Hong Kong as a backdrop for formulaic colonial adventures, romances, and elaborate crime plots, from Mason’s *The World of Suzie Wong* (1957) and Coates’s *The Road* (1959), to more contemporary texts like Alice Greenway’s *White Ghost Girls* (2006), in which two sisters navigate their identities and relationship amidst the dangers of the Vietnam war and the Maoist revolution.[[423]](#footnote-424) In many of these narratives, ‘Hong Kong” in such fiction is little more than an exoticized setting’, that could be that could be any other Asian city.[[424]](#footnote-425) Katherine Isobel Baxter writes of Rachel Lindsey’s romance novel *Forbidden Love* (1984), for example, that ‘whilst Simon is no doubt rejected because of his nationality there would be little difference to his characterisation (or role in the plot) had he been German, say’.[[425]](#footnote-426) Equally, in Timothy Mo’s *The Monkey King (1978)*, for example, Hong Kong functions as a space that facilitates exploration of ‘opposing sides of an ethnic and linguistic divide’.[[426]](#footnote-427) Orientalist imagery, binaries that clash East with West, contrast Hong Kong with the mainland, or simply juxtapose two opposing cultures, are rife within these narratives. However, some writing of this late- to post-colonial period moves beyond these narrative formulae, transforming Hong Kong from backdrop to focal point.

Ho identifies Po Wah Lam’s *The Locust Hunter* (2004) as one of such novels from which ‘Orientalist character types’ and ‘colonialism, explicit or implicit, [are] significantly absent’. She writes that Lam breaks free of limiting and reductive depictions of Hong Kong by interspersing ‘first- with third person narrators’ in such a way that, ‘village life in the 1960s and 1970s, filtered by the child’s imagination, crosses between the real and fantastical and evokes limitless space [that] becomes dreamlike’.[[427]](#footnote-428) A similar narrative formula is evident in Xi Xi’s *My City: A Hongkong Story (2003)* and Leung Ping-kwan’s short story collection, *Islands and Continents (2007),* both of which explore narrative tools for breaking restrictive formulae, and instead ‘bring[ing] Hong Kong to life’.[[428]](#footnote-429) Unlike the “defensive” narrative techniques discussed in Chapter 1, which reinforce international binaries and socio-political anxieties, Xi and Leung explore a Hong Kong identity playfully, constantly reminding the reader that Hong Kong cannot be defined objectively, that it is the product of both shared and conflicting subjective experiences. In Xi’s preface to the 1989 edition of *My City*, she writes ‘I decided to write a lively novel, … about the younger generation – their lives and their city – to feel the way they feel, to speak in the language they use’.[[429]](#footnote-430) The novel follows narrator Fruits’ journey through adolescence in a highly imaginative and often surrealist exploration of his relationship with friends and family, previous generations, and the Hong Kong space. Similarly, *Islands and Continents* depicts ‘character[s’] shared memories and ties with Hong Kong’ as they deal with personal crises.[[430]](#footnote-431)

Both Xi and Leung explicitly address the need to reconsider Hong Kong’s representation in literary contexts; Leung, for example, is critical of narrative tropes through which Hong Kong is ‘pushed aside by the forces at work around us, pushed out to the margins ... so often represented and misrepresented by others’, explaining we ‘find ourselves transformed into some non-existent reality’,[[431]](#footnote-432) while Xi Xi is ‘delighted’ to hear reports that her literary ‘strolling has gone complete off key’.[[432]](#footnote-433) Both Xi Xi and Leung explicitly reject ‘formula[ic]’[[433]](#footnote-434) and ‘authorit[ative]’[[434]](#footnote-435) ideas of what Hong Kong is and thus avoid professing any ‘truthfulness’ in their narratives, and the defensiveness that proved so paralysing in the narratives explored in Chapter 1. While Leung, ‘dr[aws] on magical realism to explore the absurd reality of Hong Kong ... probing into the question of why there [are] so many different, even conflicting, cultural strata in a single society’,[[435]](#footnote-436) Xi seeks to capture the voices of multiple generations. *My City* ‘us[es] "scattered perspective" ... [where] instead of one focal point of observation, different objects in a painting are shown from different perspectives – a technique not dissimilar to that adopted by the cubists'.[[436]](#footnote-437) Similarly, in *Islands and Continents*, Leung ‘re-assess[es] [his] own reality through the imaginative lens’ by examining Hong Kong culture ‘from a number of widely varying perspectives’.[[437]](#footnote-438) Through this perspective multiplicity, Xi and Leung focus on the human, subjective and experiential, constructing Hong Kong through personal attachments to Hong Kong places and people, as opposed to through transnational networks and relations.

Leung explains that it is important to break linguistic habits when representing Hong Kong. In ‘Borders’ his narrator reflects,

the trouble starts the moment we write anything down on paper. That’s when words stick together so easily and when they fall into old set forms, into constantly repeated clichés. We want to break them up, these linguistic formulae, these thought patterns we have formed out of habit.[[438]](#footnote-439)

This need to develop a way of representing Hong Kong outside of the compromising patterns of language is one reason I have chosen to analyse a contemporary art exhibition ‘From Ocean to Horizon’ at Manchester’s Centre for Contemporary Chinese Art (CFCCA), a collection of subjective, imaginative projects, ‘inspired by the relationship between the ocean and the horizon line: a fluid, imaginary and liminal intersection between sea and sky’.[[439]](#footnote-440) This specific exhibition is significant because artists avoided thematic clichés of “inbetween-ness”, marginality and political struggle or defiance that has tended to dominate post-umbrella revolution localist artwork. Instead, like Xi and Leung’s narratives, key artworks display a common theme of subjective multiplicity, and personal experience. The exhibition describes this ‘intersection’ as a

shifting boundary ... symbolic of Hong Kong[;] a city that defies categorisation, a dense metropolis undergoing continual and rapid physical, social and cultural transformations – and one that also has a very special relationship to the ocean with its unique island geography and famous deep, natural harbour.[[440]](#footnote-441)

In their multimedia pieces, artists foreground a symbiosis between the individual imagination and Hong Kong’s geography; producing a pointedly subjective and yet, paradoxically, cohesive map, positioning Hong Kong as a centre for identity construction.

On one level, the extra-lingual nature of these pieces both provided inspiration for how I might also “map” my own and my protagonist’s experiences without relying on dominant linguistic tropes. The process of having to ‘translate’ these artists’ methods back into writing, foregrounded features and pitfalls of language that I might otherwise have overlooked. This process drew my attention to clichés and formulae that artists had naturally avoided but that an Anglophone writer such as myself might habitually use. “Translating” visual techniques into language thus encouraged me to make the ‘linguistic and technical innovations’ that Leung and Xi deem necessary in re-writing Hong Kong.[[441]](#footnote-442)

My primary take-away from Xi, Leung and CFCCA artists’ maps of Hong Kong is the notion of Hong Kong as the product of multiple and often conflicting imaginations. Within these works, language itself is presented as misleading, often nonsensical, and contrived, and in which the search for ‘some special significance, some larger meaning’ is ultimately futile.[[442]](#footnote-443) Leung captures this idea in ‘Transcendence and the Fax Machine’, presenting his protagonist’s effort to conflate a random assortment of advertisements as compulsive and ridiculous; the protagonist ‘stud[ies] these faxes even more closely, examining at length each and every sign, symbol, signifier’, speculating, ‘there didn’t seem to be any connection whatsoever ..., but on the other hand, maybe there was’.[[443]](#footnote-444) This attraction to over-analysis and fixing meaning represents a compulsion to define Hong Kong, while the character’s frantic and perpetual re-assessment of his identity and the nature of “reality” is symbolic of discursive anxiety this compulsion produces. In this and Leung’s other stories, only once these detached and delusional characters realise that ‘there are no easy answers, no formulae ... to explain things away’ can they begin to reassess the value of their subjective experience. Only then do they find ‘a gap [opening] somewhere, loosening the original order of things’ and figuratively ‘retur[n] to the human world’.[[444]](#footnote-445) This world is disordered and rife with uncertainties, and yet, unlike Han Suyin’s ‘terribly muddled’ protagonist or the defensive poetic voices Ingham describes, Xi Xi and Leung’s characters draw comfort from it.

Xi’s old scholar character epitomises this sentiment. As he reads stories and histories about countries, cities and generations, he initially ‘likes to measure paper with his rulers’, perpetually searching for an ‘accurate ruler’.[[445]](#footnote-446) Here, Xi plays on the dual meanings of ‘ruler’, simultaneously denoting accuracy and authority, exemplified as one of the rulers ‘prides itself on being World Authority Ruler’.[[446]](#footnote-447) However, these “objective” and “authoritative” readings of space ‘come up with so many –isms’ offering conflicting master-theories like ‘there must be native flavour’, ‘there must be city flavour’, ‘there must be social consciousness’, ‘there should be a long range missile’, and, finally, ‘there must be something eternal’,[[447]](#footnote-448) that in the end he decides, ‘far better to talk to the paper, asking it ‘how are you’. Xi personifies the rulers, whose ‘individual personalities become apparent’, and the papers, say ‘please don’t measure me with rulers ... I’m nonsense’.[[448]](#footnote-449) In so doing, Xi proposes that the best way to understand the papers on national or spatial identity, is to interact with them subjectively. The conclusion of this scene is crucial to my own creative methodology; I take this scene as a metaphorical model for how to interact with and ultimately write about Hong Kong. Rejecting a sole reliance on singular models such as political binaries, ideas about ethnicity or ‘nativeness’, ‘historical destinies’, or ‘local’ distinctiveness, my “narrative state” model makes room for multiple models of identity to co-exist and contradict each other in a single novel.

**Interrogating Language**

Xi’s key concern ‘of making readers look at familiar places from a new point of view’,[[449]](#footnote-450) begins with a destabilisation of taken-for-granted meanings and signifiers. She embodies this concern in her manipulation of place names. Hung explains, for example, that Xi’s modification of place names, like the renaming of Tsim Sha Tsui to ‘Fat Sha Tsui’ to account for its expansion through land reclamation,[[450]](#footnote-451) causes the reader to question their trust in the authority of language in the world around them. Throughout the novel, Xi’s narrator, Fruits, interrogates disconnections between every-day phrases and his experience. He recalls, for example, how he used to think “moving house” meant ‘put[ting] their arms around the house and mov[ing] it wherever we’re going’ but now knows that ‘moving house is: wrap all bowls, plates, cups and spoons individually in tissue paper or old newspaper, ... then put them into a plastic bucket’. Trusting his own experience more than the literal meaning of the phrase, he concludes ‘sure enough I learn what moving house means’.[[451]](#footnote-452) Furthermore, Fruits focusses instead on pattern, texture and shapes and colour, rather than names, labels or expressions, as he describes his surroundings. He reflects, for example, ‘the reddish yellow may very well be light bulbs, the bluish green fluorescent tubes ... At night, or on days of colourless skies there would be a red light hanging in the air behind the buildings’.[[452]](#footnote-453) In this example, manipulating syntax, Xi prioritises colour over the object name, while elsewhere he avoids using object names altogether. The technique is epitomised when Fruits describes the sun by using a metaphor and a simile together: ‘the white ball was also like the moon rising slowly from the ocean’.[[453]](#footnote-454) Never actually mentioning what the object really is, instead he focuses on shapes and colours, providing a more sensual, subjective impression but one that is more descriptively affective. These moments, where “meaning” is derived through personal experience rather than taken-for-granted patterns of language, exemplify Xi’s own narrative methodology in which she overlaps subjective memories and individual associations in place of a single authoritative narrator.

Developing this methodological angle, Xi uses the motif of glass to illustrate a divide between individuals and objects. In *My City*, objects are displaced, ‘snapped up by ... lenses’,[[454]](#footnote-455) ‘fil[ling]’ up mirrors,[[455]](#footnote-456) or distanced behind a window. Fruits observes, for example,

from this side of the window one could not see the colours and shapes on the other side ... Only sunlight could get through, but when it did its brightness was not the same. I studied the sunlight for a good while and discovered what it was like: Grand's Oatmeal.[[456]](#footnote-457)

Here, the glass distorts the images of the outside world, causing Fruits to reconsider his perception of reality. Suddenly confronted with the dissociated sunlight, Fruits uncovers patterns and effects that he had previously overlooked. These glass barriers function as what Fruits calls 'an extra eye',[[457]](#footnote-458) illuminating new connections between seemingly disparate elements of the Hong Kong space and his own subjective experiences and memories. A similar technique is used by CFCCA artist Trevor Yeung in his piece ‘Spirit Level’,[[458]](#footnote-459) where marine life and ‘locally sourced horticultural materials’ are kept behind glass in eye-level fish tanks. This encourages the viewer ‘to poetically interpret [Hong Kong’s] physical landscapes’ and reconnect with taken-for-granted details in new imaginative ways.[[459]](#footnote-460)



*figure 2.1*

*figure 2.0*

Furthermore, by removing the objects from the tanks after the exhibition launch (fig.2.1), Yeung focalises the glass itself, highlighting its function as both a barrier between viewer and object, and a frame. Like the process of artistic study and representation itself, in both Xi and Yeung’s works, glass foregrounds the deeply subjective relationship between the reader or viewer and reality.

In my own novel, I use phone screens, camera lenses and windows to recreate this barrier and displacement. This is exemplified in my epilogue, when my protagonist looks out of an aeroplane window at night. She reflects,

star[ing] out through triple-glazing … [f]rom here it is impossible to judge … distance…. The more Anna stares, the less sure she becomes. She scans for a reference, something with familiar dimensions, but there is nothing, only dotted lines painted on tarmac.[[460]](#footnote-461)

When she ‘fixes her eyes on a backlit arrow’, Anna is aware what the object is and yet unable to derive any meaning from this knowledge. She fails to determine the object’s dimensions or its significance, ‘imagining it first as no taller than a street sign, then towering like a gantry; neither seem to fit’. The plane window acts as a barrier between Anna (and others on the plane) and the outside world, transforming it into a two-dimensional image that she is unable to “understand”. This new reduced perspective forces Anna to interrogate the accuracy of what she sees, comparing her own interpretation with what she imagines other passengers might see, as they also figuratively ‘wrestle with its edges’. Unable to ‘fit’ the object into the two models she imagines: the ‘street sign’ and the towering ‘gantry’, the narration alludes to the inaccuracy of her frameworks of perception.[[461]](#footnote-462) This window scene exemplifies a key aspect of my methodology; Anna’s perpetual confrontation with her inability to contain or accurately record or remember. When she retraces a path, for example, her memories fail her, and she ‘remember[s] every twist and every turning [only] as she takes it’, reflecting, ‘the space pours itself into the mould in her mind and only then does she recognise its shape’.[[462]](#footnote-463)

My novel then demonstrates how Anna navigates and maps using her own subjective interpretations of signs such as expressions of speech and literal topographical signposts. For example, Anna, offers to help her co-teacher, Claudi, stamp handbooks, and is told there is ‘nothing to do’. Anna infers that this means there is nothing Claudi would *trust her* to do and decides to leave her to perform the task alone.[[463]](#footnote-464) As this example demonstrates, as Anna moves through social spaces she interprets literal meanings subjectively, transforming them into directions by which she can navigate. This subjective navigation also applies in her interpretation of topographical signs. When returning to the village where she used to live, a “welcome” sign that once made her think of home and familiarity, now causes her to feel alienation.

A familiar junction takes [Anna] by surprise.

*Welcome to Tai Po.* She read it most nights.

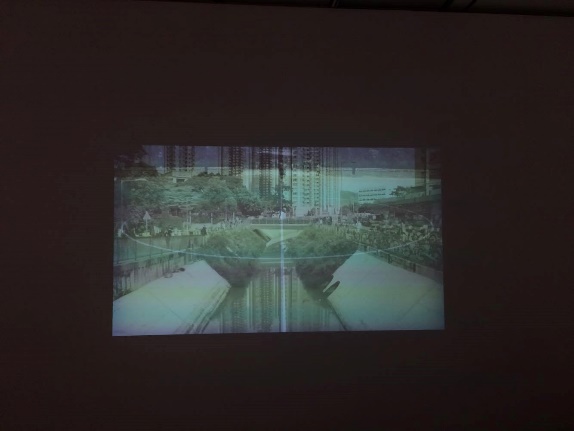
… But before long a new shade of trepidation begins to creep.[[464]](#footnote-465)

While this signpost marks the entrance to the village and the progress of their literal journey, in Anna’s cognitive map, it marks the entrance to the past and an influx of disturbing memories, and ‘the edge of Anna’s recurring nightmare’.[[465]](#footnote-466) Anna makes these translations self-consciously, always aware of the influence that memory and temporal disjuncture have on her experience of reality, encouraging the reader to also distrust the apparent objectivity of language, including her own narration.

**Reconsidering Marginality**

My own novel encourages the reader to question the objectivity of language and frameworks for literally or narratively navigating Hong Kong. In so doing, I interrogate the habitual use of common narrative tropes such as the idea that Hong Kong is necessarily marginal and struggling. Elizabeth Jackson calls the ‘contestation and renegotiation of the meaning of spaces’, a ‘re-making’, and argues it is ‘central to much ... postcolonial work’.[[466]](#footnote-467) That is not to say that Hong Kong has not been, or is often, marginalised, either by more dominant discourses or through self-definition. I do not wish to “deny” Hong Kong this aspect of its identity, I intend only to open-up questions about how ideas of marginality might be rechannelled to prevent my own narrative from further marginalising Hong Kong. When developing my methodology, I seek to avoid positioning my own narrative voice as one of these ‘dominant’, marginalising narratives, using techniques I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. I therefore draw on the ways in which local writers acknowledge Hong Kong’s marginality without making it a dominant theme or positioning it as a notion which must be struggled against.

Xi Xi, Leung and CFCCA artists, for example, focalise the centrality of Hong Kong in the lives of its inhabitants, both for individuals and as an anchor for social networks, while foregrounding other features of typically ‘marginal’ or ‘liminal’ spaces that overshadow ideas of liminality. ‘From Ocean to Horizon’ artists embody a renegotiation of the marginality. By foregrounding border and in-between spaces within Hong Kong, artists display them as aesthetically significant, functional, or connective. In ‘Lying in Gardens謊園’[[467]](#footnote-468), a montage video of scenes of Hong Kong, Tang Kwok-hin ‘investigates the idea of formal borders, boundaries and official demarcations[,] physical divides that exist within public spaces in Hong Kong’.[[468]](#footnote-469)



*figure 1.0*

*figure 1.1*

In figure 1.1, Tang focalises the verges’ symmetry and texture, juxtaposing their smooth monochrome with overgrown foliage. In so doing, he showcases their aesthetic value, positioning them as central in the frame and symbolically important. I employ a similar technique in my novel, as Anna explores derelict building sites and grass verges, transforming discarded building materials into striking and symbolic images. For example, she revisits a ‘path ... bordered by chain link and trees either side’, which have ‘grown thicker in her absence’. Though ‘[f]rom a distance, it is a jungle’, ‘up-close it resembles foliage in a zoo’.[[469]](#footnote-470) Anna personifies and derives meaning from this overlooked space and the littering of discarded objects, where ‘roots force their way through paving slabs [..] ensnaring cracked traffic cones and dry concrete trolls’.[[470]](#footnote-471) It is in these marginal spaces that Anna’s psychological developments take place, projecting her feeling of paranoia and nostalgia onto the space, imagining that the ‘eyelids [of the concrete mounds] bulge as she passes’ and imagining that ‘[t]hey remember her’.[[471]](#footnote-472) As she does so, both Anna and the reader psychoanalyse her inferences and imagining, making these border spaces crucial in the narrative.

Tang also uses the verges to connect otherwise separate social spaces in a single image: the parallel streets either side; the distant housing blocks to which the water appears to lead, and these same blocks which are reflected on the surface. This otherwise functional and overlooked area is transformed by Tang into an anchor for social activity. Similarly, in figure 1.0, Tang fixes the camera on a barbed-wire topped wall, which is dull and featureless, yet functions in the frame as a connecting point between surrounding green spaces, the pedestrian walk way and the road it bisects. Anchoring the camera thus, Tang focalises the wall as a point of commonality between the pedestrians who walk in to and out of the frame and the Street Official who polices these spaces. By focussing on the Official’s human behaviour; his pacing, relaxed stance, drinking, and his acknowledgement of the camera, Tang unites him with the other pedestrians and the viewer. In so doing, he shifts the focus away from the idea of strictly demarcated boundaries and towards human connectivity and commonality. In my novel, I similarly re-position liminal spaces as sites of connection. For example, when Anna’s taxi is diverted by roadworks that spill over from the roadside, when ‘[t]he driver snarls at the barricade … Anna nods and copies his expression’, signifying an unspoken exchange between them. While their exchange is brief, this shared annoyance and mirrored behaviour establishes a connection between them. Furthermore, observing ‘grass [that] spouts in their gutters… [and] [r]oad works [that] collapse around pits that gape open[,] Anna feels at home for the first time since the flight’.[[472]](#footnote-473) This feeling is described deliberately ambiguously, where ‘home’ denotes both her English home and her Hong Kong home. It is unclear whether Anna feels ‘at home’ due to literal recognition of or nostalgia for familiar details or sees the chaos as a fitting backdrop for her psychological disarray. The verge is transformed from a liminal space to one in which aspects of “home”, “away”, England, Hong Kong, Anna’s mental landscape and the driver’s are juxtaposed and united in important ways.

By ‘renegotiating the meaning’ of liminal spaces within the text, I metonymically renegotiate the ‘marginality’ of Hong Kong in identity writing. While I do not wish to deny Hong Kong its marginal identity, an identity often “re-claimed” by local writers as a source of strength and uniqueness,[[473]](#footnote-474),[[474]](#footnote-475) at the same time, it is important that my own narrator does not symbolically or discursively enforce this marginality, by claiming a dominant positionality or authority over the space. I therefore position liminal spaces as having authority over Anna (and thus the narrator whose narrative is bound by Anna’s thoughts), in that these spaces cause intense personal transformations and disorientations beyond her control. This idea is encapsulated in the setting of the novel’s crisis moments, for example, the traffic accident in which Kallum is killed that takes place ‘overlapping the border where the curb retreats into a layby’.[[475]](#footnote-476) For most of the novel, Anna is unable to revisit this space, both physically and psychologically, unable to face the memory. In these instances, Anna cannot consciously choose the narrative direction. Instead, it is the space that shapes and steers Anna’s reflections and the trajectory of the narrative. This is signified when gruesome details from the memory invade her consciousness. For example, looking out over Hong Kong from Lion’s rock and remembering Kallum, a minibus that ‘veers into a layby’ below her triggers intense psychological distress that transforms the pork bao she is eating into a gruesome replica of Kallum’s mangled face: ‘[a]s she chews, she peers in at the dark, rusty centre – fragments of gristle and jelly and flesh. The sticky dough clogs in her throat and she gags’.[[476]](#footnote-477) This triggers her decision to ‘go back; back to Tai Po, the boy in the road’, but for most of the novel she remains unable to fully process the memory, ‘turn[ing] sharply away’ from the layby where the accident took place.[[477]](#footnote-478) When, much later in the novel, she is finally forced to accept the significance of the layby memory and recognise that she already knows Kallum is dead, this realisation is invasive and beyond her control, the sounds from the road symbolically ‘chasing her to the roof’ where she goes to escape.[[478]](#footnote-479) In this way, the layby, a metonym for liminal spaces, remains central, dominating Anna’s experience as she tries to map around them.

**Re-centralising Hong Kong**

In *My City*, Hong Kong has an equally affective influence on Xi Xi’s characters. It is a site of stability to which Swim, for example, can send letters, in distinct contrast to the ship he is travelling on which ‘is in a different point everyday’.[[479]](#footnote-480) Other migrants who work with Swim keep their gazes firmly fixed on Hong Kong asking, ‘how is our city – is it doing okay’ and ‘what was the city like when you left’.[[480]](#footnote-481) Rather than defending Hong Kong against marginality, Xi demonstrates how, despite Hong Kong’s geographical marginality in relation to the mainland, in the lives of her characters Hong Kong is actually central. This centrality is exemplified as Fruits argues,

[w]hen other people say they want “to travel a bit”, they may mean going to Holland to look at the windmills, or going to Spain to watch the bullfights. However, [Merry Mak] just meant travelling in this little city under our feet [where] there are in fact many places worth travelling to. So many tourists come here everyday ... because they want to look at the fishing boats here, and the harbour, and the beaches under the summer sun, and the brilliant lights in the city at night.[[481]](#footnote-482)

Here, Fruits renegotiates the identity of his city, highlighting Hong Kong’s rich topography and geography. Unlike the ‘identity of non-identity’ discussed in Chapter 1, Xi Xi gives narrative space to what Hong Kong *is*. Where in ‘non-identity’ narratives the lens flits between Hong Kong, Britain, the mainland, and elsewhere, Xi’s remains fixed on Hong Kong. Even in the eyes of emigrant characters, Hong Kong is a central point of attraction. This focus on Hong Kong is consistent and yet understated throughout the novel, as though Hong Kong always has and always will be central in the lives and identities of its people, and thus anxieties about the disappearance of Hong Kong are absent from Xi Xi’s novel. While *My City* discursively defends Hong Kong, Xi Xi’s narrators do not adopt the compulsive defensiveness that characterised the discourse outlined in Chapter 1 and that bound Hong Kong identity to notions of threat, competition, and impending disappearance.

In my work, I draw attention to Anna’s recognition that Hong Kong is central and that it is *she* who is marginal. Like Suyin’s narrator, who ‘keeps up with business in Hong Kong ... by watching the lobby of one hotel’,[[482]](#footnote-483) I use a protagonist to focalise the narrative lens. This technique of using an ‘outsider’ perspective has been used since Suyin by writers like Timothy Mo, for example. In his satiric novel, *Monkey King*, Mo uses the Eurasian marginalised outsider, Wallace Nolasco, to “look-in” at Cantonese culture and people at a specific historical moment, the 1950s to 1970s.[[483]](#footnote-484) Mo’s depiction of the Poon family is almost entirely filtered through the sarcastic lens of Wallace and the Poons are reduced to comic characters of whom he is critical, suspicious,[[484]](#footnote-485) and mocking. Wallace and the Poon family are ‘equally segregationalist and culturally supremacist’,[[485]](#footnote-486) and Mo uses this duality to illustrate a racial binary. In my novel, however, my protagonist’s observation of social interactions triggers *internal* reflections and causes her to evaluate her own perspective across this insider/outsider dialectic. This is exemplified in a scene where she visits a coffee shop and finds that customers and the barista are familiar with one another but treat Anna with courteous detachment. Though ‘[s]he smiles at the cashier[,] he repeats her order with indifference and asks for four dollars’.[[486]](#footnote-487) In contrast to the ‘familiar’ customer, whose ‘Cantonese order bounces with routine’ and with whom the barista exchanges playful insults ‘and smirks when she says something Anna can’t guess’, Anna feels ‘dismiss[ed]’ with a ‘*thank you* that means nothing else’.[[487]](#footnote-488) While, for most of the novel, Anna is exploring the New Territories where she receives attention for being different, on Hong Kong island she feels grouped with other tourists, like the ‘Australian family waiting for frappes’ in a Starbucks in Central.[[488]](#footnote-489) Neither admired nor victimised for being unusual but simply treated with indifference, Anna is frustrated by the realisation that she is no longer a focal point. Instead it is the local that pulls Anna’s gaze, intrigued by and jealous of the local woman’s ease, and the narrative gaze thus positions the local as central.

**The Place of “Locality”**

Conflicting ideas about the relationship between Hong Kong and its citizens are evident across my interviews. British expatriate, Rachel, states that she doesn’t ‘miss Hong Kong itself, [just] the location’ as it is ‘perfect to go travel’.[[489]](#footnote-490) She describes Hong Kong as a place to ‘escape to’, for people who have ‘got nowhere to go in life’ and ‘never picture anything permanent there at all’.[[490]](#footnote-491) Several Hong Kong locals discussed the possibility of their leaving Hong Kong, depending on ‘safe[ty]’ [[491]](#footnote-492) and political and economic ‘stab[ility]’.[[492]](#footnote-493) Other local participants describe Hong Kong as a ‘home’, a place they will ‘stay for [their] whole li[ves]’.[[493]](#footnote-494) In these varying perspectives, the notion of ‘permanence’ is evidently crucial in determining the extent to which individuals feel attached to Hong Kong. Leung encapsulates this idea in ‘Borders’ when he reflects,

No matter how much we may want to keep on travelling, going to new places, seeing new things ... we also want – even more badly – to stop, to settle down in some kindly community, among familiar people, to find ourselves a space in which to live and work.[[494]](#footnote-495)

It is this notion of “belonging” and permanence that distinguishes Xi Xi and Leung’s representations of Hong Kong, and it reflects a conscious move away from the trope of impermanence established by Suyin and echoed in the novels of Preston Schoyer, Christopher New and Xu Xi.

Just like Suyin, Xi Xi and Leung Ping-kwan demonstrate the importance of Hong Kong’s ‘here and now’[[495]](#footnote-496) in the lives of its inhabitants. However, while Suyin represents this ‘here and now’ as perpetually mutating, unpredictable and home to displaced and transient ‘sitters-on-the-fence’,[[496]](#footnote-497) Xi Xi and Leung focalise characters who feel a sense of belonging in Hong Kong. This difference is illustrated in each text’s treatment of travel. Xu Xi’s *The Unwalled City* establishes Hong Kong as a base to travel to and from, for characters constantly preoccupied with America, Canada, and mainland China. In Xi Xi’s *My City*, however, Hong Kong is a home to return to between work overseas; as Swim, for example, departs Hong Kong he ‘[draws] a circle around the port where he had started off, saying, ‘Goodbye ... My beloved beautiful and ugly city’, and opposes other passengers who ‘say: Now we’re rid of this dirty overpopulated suffocating city, [we will] never come back’.[[497]](#footnote-498) Swim’s emotional attachment to Hong Kong echoes Xi’s own use of possessive pronoun in the title of her novel. This sense of permanence is epitomised when Fruits reflects, ‘[g]eography is interesting, it tells you how huge our space is. As for history, it tells you that time is without beginning and end’.[[498]](#footnote-499) Here, Fruits situates the present in a vast framework of space and time which brings him a sense of security. This model thus contrasts with much contemporary Hong Kong identity discourse, from Han Suyin’s novel of Hong Kong’s early globalisation to Abbas’s present-day anxieties about the ‘disappearance’ of a local identity. Abbas writes of a ‘global compression’ of time and space that eliminates Hong Kong’s ‘sense of history creating a homogenized space’. While Suyin and Xu Xi’s characters cling to the present, fearful of the global contingencies like future ‘deadlines’[[499]](#footnote-500),[[500]](#footnote-501) determined through transnational politics, Fruits inferably accepts that the present may be fleeting but is comforted by the idea of histories and futures, both personal and shared. In so doing, Xi Xi paints this ‘here and now’ as a site of anchorage.

In my novel, Anna is caught between these conflicting notions of Hong Kong as an impermanent space in which she can contain and forget about her past experiences, and of Hong Kong as a centre, drawing her back. Anna believes she is returning to Hong Kong to search for Kallum, seeing Hong Kong as a passive space, and Kallum as an object to be found and retrieved. This initial perspective echoes the treatment of Hong Kong as a backdrop in typical Hong Kong adventure narratives, like Schoyer’s *The Typhoon’s Eye* and Mo’s *The Monkey King*, for example. In Schoyer’s novel, Hong Kong is no more than the setting for Caroline Weitzel’s philanthropic mission,[[501]](#footnote-502) while Mo treats Hong Kong as a canvas for Nolasco’s quest for fortunes.[[502]](#footnote-503) In my novel, however, from the moment she takes off, Anna begins to realise that her interaction with Hong Kong will be much more bilateral, that Hong Kong will affect her much more than she affects it.

She’d felt ready to go back, to begin from the start on her own terms, her own time, but she finds herself powerless to something drawing her in- to the memory of tai wo, of the boy in the road, and a feeling of sickly nostalgia.[[503]](#footnote-504)

Here, Anna is confronted with the realisation that she has a more subjective, and complex relationship with Hong Kong, and that habits she acquired there are already ‘beginning to … regrow’.[[504]](#footnote-505) This sudden realisation comes ‘already too late’ and she is powerless to prevent it.[[505]](#footnote-506) As the novel progresses it becomes clear that Anna has been compelled to return for reasons that surpass her literal search for Kallum: to alleviate her guilt and explore her past experiences, which suggests that she has been unable to fully detach herself from Hong Kong. Hong Kong is at the centre of Anna’s story, having continued to shape her actions, even though she has not been physically present, and now compelling her to return almost against her will.

In Leung’s *Islands and Continents* and Xi Xi’s *My City*, Hong Kong is characterised by this close relationship between individuals and the Hong Kong space. In Leung’s short stories, this is expressed through a common narrative epiphany. In stories such as ‘Romance of the Rib’ and ‘Islands and Continents’, both of which concern a protagonist seeking subject stability, resolution only occurs once characters have ‘confronted [a] new and complex reality’ and relinquish ‘private world[s]’ in order to make ‘meaningful contact’ by participating in ‘transaction[s]’ with the ‘world’.[[506]](#footnote-507) As the narrator of ‘Islands and Continents’, advises,

you talk about hiding yourself in a cave, you say you *are* a cave, but in this city that’s out of the question; there are too many kinds of entanglement. It is impossible to extract yourself from all the multiple connections.[[507]](#footnote-508)

Leung’s use of ambiguity and multiplicity allows this idea of ‘entanglement’ to encompass both social connections and connections between individuals and space. Similarly, in *My City*, when Fruits awakens to find every building and object in the city has been wrapped like a parcel, he participates in “unwrapping” the city, ‘cut[ting] open all the parcels’, despite this being a ‘job you’d never finish’.[[508]](#footnote-509) Here “unwrapping” is also symbolic; by physically interacting with the space, Fruits is able to “uncover” meaning. Furthermore, concluding that ‘he does not want to be a parcel either’[[509]](#footnote-510), Fruits suggests that he himself will be “unwrapped” in the process, again symbolic of self-discovery and the realisation of his potential as a Hong Kong citizen. Through this surrealist scenario, Xi demonstrates the interconnectedness of the individual, society and the Hong Kong space, which *mutually* support and “produce” one other. In both Xi and Leung’s works, individuals depend on Hong Kong, centralising its importance in the lives of their characters and in their narratives.

**An Imagined and Imaginative Space**

Foregrounding the interconnectedness of Hong Kong’s geography, topography, and subjectivity, Xi, Leung and CFCCA artists explore the reader/viewers’ ‘creative involvement with texts’, an ‘interpretive, exegetical and, above all, imaginative engagement’ that Boehmer positions as a postcolonial aesthetic.[[510]](#footnote-511) Their works are post-colonial in that Hong Kong is presented as both supporting and supported by individual collective imaginations, rather than assigned an identity in theoretical and political negotiations.

‘From Ocean to Horizon’ artist Ko Sin Tung focalises the inextricability of Hong Kong’s space and the lives, livelihoods and identities of its inhabitants, by focussing on the role of the imagination in simultaneously producing and responding to the external environment. Ko ‘create[s] new works responding to the themes of oceans and bodies of water through their everyday experiences of living and working in Hong Kong’.[[511]](#footnote-512)



*figure 4.0*

Ko’s looped video clip, ‘Redundant Waves’, is an extreme close-up of blue and white striped tarpaulin rippling in the wind, which resembles the undulations of the ocean. A common material seen around Hong Kong’s wet markets, on one level, the tarpaulin reminds viewers of the close relationship between Hong Kong’s geography and livelihoods. At the same time, however, the artwork forces the viewer to engage in a deeper, imaginative interaction with the image. By omitting the tarpaulin’s situational context, Ko decontextualizes the material, and the parallel image of the ocean is generated by the viewer. In this interaction, the tarpaulin itself becomes “redundant”. Tung’s work metonymically embodies this immersive process, demonstrating the role the individual plays in both literally and imaginatively producing and maintaining Hong Kong’s unique environment.

Returning to Xi’s decision to ‘write a lively novel ... about the younger generation – their lives and their city – to feel the way they feel, to speak in the language they use’,[[512]](#footnote-513) the parallel positioning of ‘language’ and ‘feeling’ suggests her ideas about their equal importance in the “life” of her narrative and of Hong Kong. In her narrative map of Hong Kong, language and feeling are inextricable concepts; just as affect, memory and emotional connections determine the shifts between narrative frames, characters respond emotionally to language. Both in the external world (street signs and academic papers) and in characters’ own narrativisations, language triggers further associations. This is epitomised in Xi’s chapter comprised entirely of descriptions of photos.[[513]](#footnote-514) In Fruits’ map of Public Gardens, football stadiums and pavilions,[[514]](#footnote-515) he uses his own memories as signposts and links spaces together through trivial narrative threads. For example, documenting Merry Mak’s consumption of chillies: first, Fruits maps the neighbourhood, plotting the relationship between Merry Mak and his neighbour by focusing on their conversation about the ‘chillies on Merry Mak’s wall’; later, he guides the narrative towards the park, explaining its significance as the site in which ‘one time [Merry Mak] ate two’ strings of chillies;[[515]](#footnote-516) finally, he leads the reader through the park to a racist sign which once made Merry Mak ‘so furious that even two strings of chillies did not cure him’.[[516]](#footnote-517) These new connections that form between feelings and language produce a thick narrative tapestry that is thus more resistant to master narratives and theories about what Hong Kong objectively is.

Leung’s idea about the importance of affect in “mapping” Hong Kong is more explicit. Memories function like temporal signposts and emotions linked to specific spaces provide topographical texture. As Leung explains, ‘some days are more memorable because of a play that you liked ... or because we were with friends, or because the temperature suddenly dropped’.[[517]](#footnote-518) Equally, the narrator of ‘Islands and Continents’, imagines that ‘new living spaces [are] somehow linked to emotional changes in people’s lives’.[[518]](#footnote-519) Here, Leung prioritises trivial, personal detail over objective markers, concluding ‘I can never remember dates’.[[519]](#footnote-520) When the narrator of Leung’s ‘Borders’ realises that it is an ‘illusion’ to think that ‘everything can be consigned to its proper place in space and time’, he reflects, ‘the best map in the world can never guarantee that we will not end up in a cul-de-sac. In real life the roads are not like the ones we talk about’.[[520]](#footnote-521) Leung uses metaphors of spatial exploration to describe the process of “discovering” or constricting identity; as his ‘Borders’ narrator writes to a friend, ‘I have always wanted you to have the space to develop on your own, even if that means ... following all sorts of detours, perhaps taking a longer time to reach your destination’.[[521]](#footnote-522) Here, Leung uses the metaphor of journeying, less about ‘destination’ than personal development, as a metonym for writing. He poses ‘a flow of language’ and imaginative personal reflection, as the favourable opposite of objective, authoritative maps that ‘transfor[m] unknown spaces into realms of wild conjecture’.[[522]](#footnote-523) Leung’s model for “mapping” space does not therefore seek to assertively define Hong Kong, but instead to demonstrate the discursive and affective processes by which Hong Kong identity develops and manifests.

By suggesting that ‘in real life’ Hong Kong cannot be objectively defined, Leung’s Hong Kong is unthreatened by contradictions. In this sense, Leung’s Hong Kong narrative builds on Henry James’ classic model of the novel in which the writer may channel ‘a sense of reality’ but with an awareness that ‘reality has a myriad forms’ and cannot be reduced to a formula.[[523]](#footnote-524) Echoes of James’s notion that the ‘experience’ that underpins such writing ‘is never limited and never complete’ can be traced in the epitaph that opens this chapter.[[524]](#footnote-525) When Leung’s narrator rejects the notion of a ‘tidy, well-ordered world’, telling a friend, ‘[i]f you weren’t there, things would be incomplete’,[[525]](#footnote-526) the second person pronoun also addresses the reader, demonstrating the inclusiveness of all subjectivities in his model. Here, he alludes to the importance of a collection of subjectivities, individually incomplete but each inherently valuable in the production of a shared social consciousness.

It is this bond between the individual imagination and space that Anderson presents as central to “nation-building”; he writes, “nation” has profound emotional significance because it is bound not by ‘fixed ties or boundaries’ but by ‘feelings of attachment’.[[526]](#footnote-527) Au Hoi-lam’s ‘From Ocean to Horizon’ exhibition employs a similar technique.

*figure 3.2*

*figure 3.1*



*figure 3.0*

In her collection entitled ‘Unutterable Antecedents, Consequences and Coincidences’(2017), Au literally pieces together a depiction of Hong Kong from fragments of smaller artworks representing aspects of the past. In so doing, Au echoes a common technique used in the genre of historical Hong Kong writing where writers blend the personal with the public. This blending technique is epitomised in novels such as Lee Ding Fai’s *Running Dog*, where the protagonist’s personal capitalist pursuits are used to critique China’s bleak communist regime.[[527]](#footnote-528) Like Christopher New, in *The Chinese Box*, who intersperses fragments of a fictional newspaper with the protagonist’s personal story,[[528]](#footnote-529) Au positions small canvases on which she depicts her own memories beside a letter of imagined correspondence between the artist and Hong Kong. While the letter personifies Hong Kong as it considers its relationship to its colonial past, the juxtaposition scaffolds the artists’ personal story with Hong Kong’s political history. Together these artworks form a “map” of Hong Kong, both spatially and temporally; representing ‘fragments of her memories for each of the past 20 years in Hong Kong’[[529]](#footnote-530) as indistinguishable bodies of water on individual canvases, Au represents geography and history simultaneously and in a deeply personal way. Her use of shades of colour reflects how Hong Kong inspires in her what Debord calls ‘the variety of possible combinations of ambiances, ... [which] give rise to feelings as differentiated and complex as any other form of spectacle can evoke’.[[530]](#footnote-531) The complexity of these attachments is magnified by blurred boundaries between individual and collective memory. As Au’s piece explores, these “national” milestones and memories filter down and intersperse with individual memories and events. Au’s discussion of 1997 handover establishes this idea as she calls it a ‘a personal milestone, as this was the year she embarked on a career in fine art’.[[531]](#footnote-532) Representing this mixture of personal and “national”(fig 3.0), Au juxtaposes the objective-looking report, with its capitalised, regular type-face, and date stamp and Coat of Arms stamp, with the subjective, emotionally charged content of the inquiry:

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS/ ARE YOU DOING WELL.

Personifying Hong Kong, the question connotes guilt and sadness, and a sense of abandonment, highlighting its human aspects and community. Here, individual and collective subjectivities become inextricable from one another, highlighting multi-dimensional connections that thus constitute Hong Kong’s narrative identity.

In my novel, Anna’s memories of space are similarly tied to political moments, primarily the 2014 occupy central protests. Anna’s personal interactions with Hong Kong’s spaces cause her to reflect on moments of historical and political significance. As she absentmindedly waits for the Star Ferry to dock, she ‘counts decades in layers of paint on the railings’ as they flake away. She muses, ‘[t]he ‘87 rush-out, a fresh coat for ‘97… but the gloss hasn’t taken and is rippled and cracked’.[[532]](#footnote-533) As this more theoretical and collective “remembering” runs parallel to Anna’s own personal movements and memories, neither of these two frameworks alone are satisfactory. Anna recognises that

[though] she could teach herself the history; omens outside the Great Hall of the People, Basic Law and Declarations, Wong’s nattering on Netflix, … she senses something deeper between these layers of enamel.[[533]](#footnote-534)

The missing element Anna alludes to here, is evident in her inclusion of more personal, subjective experiences of these great political moments. When she revisits the protest sights, her memories don’t reflect the scenes sensationalised in the media. She remembers only a ‘scattering of nylon’ and ‘a canopy between bridges she isn’t sure if she had seen’, since the images had been ‘cropped, skewed and brightened until the pictures replaced the images in her mind’.[[534]](#footnote-535) Recognising how “collective” memory sources like media coverage and historical documentation are skewed in relation to her own experience, Anna rejects them. Instead she remembers personal, trivial details’ for example, as she ‘passes the spot where they’d decided not to smile ... [i]n the photograph’ and recounts the vivid memory of a girl injured by tear gas,[[535]](#footnote-536) where the ambiguity reflects Anna’s inability to describe the moment outside of her own subjective frameworks. For Anna, the protest sites represent pivotal moments in Hong Kong’s socio-political landscape and encourage reflection on her own positionality in relation to these moments, past and present. I discuss the implications of this narrative investigation and her positionality in greater detail in chapter three. For the purpose of this chapter, however, it is important to now discuss how emotional and affective attachments to Hong Kong become a foundation for individual subjectivity.

**Using Psychogeography**

The idea that Hong Kong is less a physical space than an imaginative realm is central to my own methodology. I return to James’s foundational model of experience as a ‘spiderweb of ... threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness’,[[536]](#footnote-537) later in my conclusion, using this metaphor as a model for my representation of Hong Kong as a “narrative state”. For now, however, I explore his idea that realist writing expresses ‘the very atmosphere of the mind’ in the contemporary context of psychogeography. James’s phrase echoes Derek Gregory’s concept of ‘geographical imaginations’; the ‘mental ground on which thoughts rest’.[[537]](#footnote-538) I draw on this concept, presenting space as both a source of, and canvas for, experience, the collection of memories, and reflection. My own narrative map draws on that of Fruits, who projects his memories back onto spaces and uses them to guide himself and the reader. In Fruits’ map, external signposting is unhelpful, symbolised as he describes how ‘there is no signboard at the park entrance’ and no ‘tourist map featuring all sorts of arrows’.[[538]](#footnote-539) While the external world triggers Fruits’ reflections, Xi’s map is less concerned with physical space than with his imaginative space. I therefore use a similar model to foreground my protagonist’s cognitive journey as opposed to claiming to map a physical reality of Hong Kong. In Chapter 3, I discuss the discursive power dynamics of mapping colonial and post-colonial spaces in English language writing, however, for the purpose of this chapter, I trace my use of spatial signposting to demonstrate the strength of my protagonist’s attachments to Hong Kong.

Through the lens of Guy-Ernest Debord’s ‘psychogeography’, I explore the ‘specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour’ of characters.[[539]](#footnote-540) Using a close third-person narrator, my narrative pieces together Anna’s experiences of Hong Kong, returning to affectively charged temporal sites: her old house triggers nostalgia and protectiveness, making her reflect on the new families that have moved to the area and ‘don’t know her’;[[540]](#footnote-541) the MTR station triggers regret, reminding her of a past moment to which she ‘aches to go back’;[[541]](#footnote-542) and, when she returns to the corner where the triad-men lived paranoia resurfaces.[[542]](#footnote-543) My use of the present tense to relate Anna’s memories demonstrates the overlap between her past and present experiences, where emotional connections to spaces are so strong that the present instance of Anna is unable to interact objectively with the space. The focalised narrative relates Anna’s projection of past experiences onto the present environment; her memory of being watched, for example, means she sees the eyes of ‘dry concrete trolls … bulge as she passes’ and she imagines that ‘they remember her’.[[543]](#footnote-544) In so doing, the narrative exposes what Debord calls ‘distinct psychic atmospheres’ but that have ‘no relation to the physical’.[[544]](#footnote-545) These atmospheres are further evident when the narrator describes places as “feelings”. For example, ‘Anna had the sense of something fading in Hong Kong, an absence different to the one she feels now. Fanling *was* that feeling – an apathy almost’.[[545]](#footnote-546) These emotional connections to places echo Gaston Bachelard’s ‘poetics of space’, where ‘space [and time] acquir[e] emotional and even rational sense ... whereby vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for use here’.[[546]](#footnote-547) Anna’s relationship to Hong Kong means that her re-exploration causes a self-re-evaluation; spaces are converted into platforms for psychological transformation.

**Temporal Connections**

In Xi, Leung and CFCCA artists’ works, affective attachments to, and imaginative maps of, space are produced through multiple imaginations. In Yeung’s aquarium exhibition, for example, the tank functions as a three-dimensional frame that encourages simultaneous gazes from different angles and responses. Xi and Leung’s works also replicate this multiplicity, using ‘shared memories’. *My City* captures the voices of multiple generations; as Hung writes,

[c]ritics have pointed out the similarity of the narrative technique in *My City* to the famous Song dynasty Chinese scroll painting 'A Trip Upstream on Qingming Festival', in that it uses a '"scattered perspective" ... [where] instead of one focal point of observation, different objects in a painting are shown from different perspectives – a technique not dissimilar to that adopted by the cubists.[[547]](#footnote-548)

Similarly, in *Islands and Continents*, Leung ‘re-assess[es] [his] own reality through the imaginative lens’ by examining Hong Kong culture ‘from a variety of angles’.[[548]](#footnote-549) The multiplicity of perspective required to “build” a more complete picture of Hong Kong is explicitly addressed by Leung’s characters. His ‘Islands and Continents’ narrator reflects that ‘as each side is viewed from the other, at various differing angles ... a complex and shifting landscape is revealed’.[[549]](#footnote-550) This inferred multiplicity and inherent contradiction reflects MikYoung and Schwartz’s argument that the ‘collective’ imagination is ‘unreal or, at best, disputable, temporary and mutable’,[[550]](#footnote-551) and yet, in the narrator’s eyes this disputability is essential. While this complexity and the shifting identity of Hong Kong caused Han Suyin and her successors to fixate on instability, Leung and Xi’s pictures of Hong Kong are “strengthened” by it.

Xi alludes to the strength of a collective imaginative investment in a Hong Kong identity in a scene in which Fruits examines his ID card:

The C.I. is proof that you belong to this city; it is proof of your citizenship. – What is your nationality ... some people will ask, because to them all this sounds very strange. And you say: Well, well, as for nationality …. You look at your C.I over and over again, and discover that you have no nationality, just citizenship.[[551]](#footnote-552)

Assuredly beginning, ‘well, well, as for nationality’, Fruits demonstrates a sense of security in his identity, confident that he knows what the card will read. Juxtaposed with his ‘discover[y]’ that this is not the case, that officially Hong Kong does not have a nation status, causing Fruits to search the card ‘over and over again’ as if in disbelief, the strength of his feelings of ‘belong[ing]’ to a collective such as a nation is magnified. Xi Xi is playful in her narrative with what Hon-Chu Leung describes as the ‘awkward positions of Hong Kong in relation to citizenship’, given the ‘“anomalous” nature of Hong Kong as a “non-national society”’.[[552]](#footnote-553) Leung similarly responds to this idea, describing the ‘limits to national conceptions of citizenship in a world characterized by shifting political boundaries and over-lapping social memberships’.[[553]](#footnote-554) Xi and Leung therefore represent Hong Kong as a space and community that cannot be defined or delineated purely in terms of ‘citizenship’. In this way, Seton-Watson’s outdated description of ‘nation’ as ‘exist[ing] when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one',[[554]](#footnote-555) seems ironically appropriate to describe their models of Hong Kong. Though initially jarring, Xi’s characters’ awareness that their identity is defined through ‘strange’ political technicalities and conflicting narratives does not undermine their faith in a connected collective, a faith Leung’s characters too eventually rediscover. My “narrative state” methodology encapsulates this notion. I suggest that, while Hong Kong is not technically a ‘nation’, a methodology that foregrounds the idea of collective investment in the idea of a community, shared affective attachments, and the psychological ‘state’ of belonging, can steer away from the notion that Hong Kong identity can be disappeared by political or legislative changes such as repatriation. In so doing, such a narrative would have less need to adopt a territorial or defensive tone.

Shared belonging is a fundamental component of Anderson’s nation. He describes the individual subject’s faith in ‘steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity’,[[555]](#footnote-556) whereby a community is connected through shared awareness that one’s own life is running parallel to others without ever needing to meet them. This notion is evident in Leung’s ‘The Romance of the Rib’, where his protagonist’s ‘larger vision of the whole’ comes through the realisation that ‘[e]ach and every individual existed on his or her own, while at the same time entering into relationships with others’.[[556]](#footnote-557) This idea of simultaneity, writes Anderson, is upheld in the individual and the collective consciousness and propagated by print capital. Referring to the nation-building devices of novels and the newspapers, Anderson writes, the ‘imagined world [is] conjured up by the author in his reader’s minds’ who have ‘complete confidence’ that the lives of individuals depicted continue independently and consistently outside of the narrative frame.[[557]](#footnote-558) This confidence is shared by Xi and Leung’s protagonists who make sudden discoveries of this ‘simultaneity’ as they interact with print and technology. For example, in Leung’s ‘Transcendence and the Fax Machine’, the machine causes his narrator to reflect,

[n]o more would I be condemned to roam ... like a lost soul, stopping ... for a chance encounter ... I could be certain of one thing when I got home: she would always be there, faithfully receiving, transmitting, ingesting, an absolutely trustworthy connection linking me and places far away.[[558]](#footnote-559)

In this passage, it is not the exchanged information itself that reassures him but the knowledge that connection ‘could’ and ‘would’ be possible. Similarly, Xi’s switchboard operator Merry Mak, witnesses ‘the whole population in the city’ simultaneously enter a phone-in competition and suddenly contemplates connectedness. Xi writes,

Merry Mak saw every single light on all the machines in front of him suddenly come on, blazing ... [He] had never seen so many lights come on at the same time ... Everyone was clamouring ... so many people were dialling the same number at the same time.[[559]](#footnote-560)

Xi’s final narrative epiphany encapsulates this “simultaneity”: he imagines, ‘when I pick up the phone, I can even call up someone I do not know and say: How are you, whoever you are’[[560]](#footnote-561), and imagines the reply of ‘a strange voice, a muffled voice, a distant voice’.[[561]](#footnote-562) This disembodied voice, is simultaneously close (in the ear-piece) and ‘distant’, a metonym for almost paradoxical distance and yet connectedness of the citizens of a nation. In these moments, both characters and readers therefore hold Hong Kong in their minds through this notion of simultaneous activity, reinforced by print and communication technology, both inside the novel and through the production of the novel itself.

In my novel, I use similar ideas of simultaneity, examining connections between people at “street level” and panoramically. As Anna moves through the crowds, she notices the multiple, instantaneous connections that are made and broken, by observing shared social spaces. When she observes the pavement of the Nathan Road, which runs through the busy commercial district of Mong Kong and Tsim Sha Tsui, she reflects, ‘every second in every flag, separate lives are united. Soles share the dull concrete slab for just a moment, before a side-step reroutes them’.[[562]](#footnote-563) Not only do these lives exist simultaneously but influence one another. This simultaneity makes Anna recognise Hong Kong as a community and reassures her that she is connected to Kallum, ‘recreat[ing] the near-misses that had guided her to [him]’.[[563]](#footnote-564) These connections are also established temporally, between Anna’s past and present, and the stretch in between. This is evident when she speculates on encounters that must have taken place in her absence, ‘count[ing] taxis’ and wondering ‘how many thousands have come and gone since she left’.[[564]](#footnote-565) This recognition of connectedness is evidently both intriguing and frustrating, evident when she climbs Lion’s Rock to escape the city, only to find herself presented with an almost encompassing view of it, causing her to ‘wonde[r] how many lives occupy this single image’, but finding herself too far removed she is unable to locate Kallum in it.[[565]](#footnote-566) By viewing the entire city at once but from a distance, she simultaneously looks straight at him and cannot see him. On one hand, this recognition of a connected community contributes to her perception of Hong Kong as permanent and enduring, and a space to which she is also connected, and should not therefore withdraw from. At the same time however, her inability to fully penetrate this close-knit network, demonstrates her recognition of herself as a partial outsider. Her narration thus positions Hong Kong as the centre, the focus of Anna’s narrative quest, as she strives to be part of it.

Xi’s Hong Kong is also a space of temporal connections: between generations, whose identities are all anchored in their shared spaces, conveyed in Xi’s overlapping of temporally separate narrative strands. Hung expresses her desire to preserve Xi Xi’s ‘seamless transitions’ between timeframes[[566]](#footnote-567) and the perspectives of characters of different generations. Her primary use of the present tense is one method of creating the feeling of “timelessness” that permits this fluidity and sense of connectedness. The effect of this present tense is exemplified in the following passage:

Every morning, a large number of people come to the food market [and] they walk in the middle of the road. At such times a car always comes driving in, tooting its horn. It’s obvious that this car has just come from another city.[[567]](#footnote-568)

Here, Hung juxtaposes the adverb ‘always’, with very specific, momentary details, describing what is ‘obvious’ about ‘this car’, as though it is being observed in the present moment. The immediacy of this moment is undermined by connotations of reoccurrence and eternity. Within this temporal space, finality is never truly final. Even when Fruits reflects, ‘[e]very day, in this city there are always some things or other (sic) quietly bidding us farewell, and then gradually disappearing’, the present tense verbs ‘bidding’ and ‘disappearing’, means the disappearance is never completed.[[568]](#footnote-569) In this eternalised space, multiple time frames can exist simultaneously, and the voices and identities that belong to these time frames are anchored in the present moment. Xi directly acknowledges this sentiment; epitomised in the following monologue that Fruits overhears through a misconnected phone line:

There is no beginning and no end to human existence. Do you think that I will cease to exist when I die? But I will be everywhere. I will be part of history; I will be part of past experience; I will be a bridge between the past and future.[[569]](#footnote-570)

Where Suyin’s Hong Kong subjectivities are underpinned by the fragility of ‘fortuitous circumstance’, here Xi’s narrative resolution demonstrates how emotional attachment to Hong Kong space and the feeling of belonging to a community eases anxiety about future uncertainties.

While characters in *My City* and *Islands and Continents* are ‘unable to answer the question’ of the future and reflect ‘[t]omorrow is a heavy burden’, they embrace this future, nonetheless. Braids, for example, wishes ‘to build a brave new world when [he] grow[s] up’,[[570]](#footnote-571) while Swim hopes to ‘save up all [his] money’ and ‘have a small café in the future’ with a bookstore and cinema beside it, not out of greed, but to be able to offer Fruits coffee, films and books ‘on the house’. When they consider the future they ask each other mundane questions such as, ‘will you still be sitting on a swing ... will you still be eating ice lollys –when you’re sixty ... will you still want my company – when I’m sixty’.[[571]](#footnote-572) Concerned with human trivialities, and enduring family ties, Braids and Swim envision futures of both economic and emotional stability. These futures, which are not contingent of politics, economics or developments of globalism, are grounded in Hong Kong both geographically and emotionally, as a space of human connection and personal attachment that are presented as constants.

Xi, Leung and CFCCA artists thus model the production of a Hong Kong identity that transcends geo-political uncertainty and is an anchor for social networks and communities. It is this notion of connection that Fredric Jameson finds regretfully absent from contemporary identity discourse.[[572]](#footnote-573) He argues that ‘in the post-modern condition ... we have lost a sense of the social totality’ and points to ‘the need to create new conceptual space’ through the representation of ‘cognitive maps’’. As Richard Phillips similarly argues ‘only through a new ‘aesthetics’ of cognitive mapping, in which the social totality is represented, made imaginatively accessible to the people, will a politics of that totality become possible’.[[573]](#footnote-574) It is this sense of ‘totality’, a collection of lived experiences that transcend social and temporal boundaries, that Xi Xi and Leung pursue, and that I recreate in my own novel. This methodology focusses on the subjective, the disputable and the personal, rather than on territorial and politically defined demarcations. By highlighting multi-dimensional and complex connections between Hong Kong individuals, generations and Hong Kong, past, present and future, both real and imaginary, this methodologic approach steers away from the anxious narratives of future uncertainty, homogenising globalism and mainland assimilation and globalism, that have tended to characterise politically-oriented late twentieth century Hong Kong writing.

In my own novel, my use of cognitive mapping and the foregrounded social totality has an additional purpose, specifically addressing my positionality as a British writer in the post-colonial space. I explore social politics and power dynamics involved in mapping present day Hong Kong. On one hand, I do so to disrupt the clichéd ideas of Hong Kong marginal and dependent of master narratives as this chapter has demonstrated. In the following chapter, I discuss in more detail how I have also developed my methodology to disrupt the “authority” of a singular perspective. Drawing on the methods of cognitive mapping used by Xi and Leung, I present my new methodology for more responsible English language post-colonial writing.

**Chapter 3: The ‘Dual-Flâneur’: Transforming the “Gweilo” from Critic to Object**

**Representing Hong Kong in English**

I have argued thus far that much English language Hong Kong discourse by both local and migrant writers, from Han Suyin to Louise Ho, positions Hong Kong as dependent on master narratives of British colonialism, Chinese nationalism, and globalism.[[574]](#footnote-575) While much of this discourse attempts to reassert a “local” identity as autonomous and independent, this “local” identity is defined either as a hybrid of, or by its resistance to the cultures and identities of “elsewhere”. As these “elsewhere” spaces are foregrounded, the “local” is buried, and Hong Kong is thus re-positioned as marginal and dependant. As discussed in Chapter 2, however, some local discourse (Xi Xi, Leung Ping-kwan, CFCCA artists) renegotiates Hong Kong’s marginality, foregrounding the territory’s centrality in the lives of its residents. However, no matter how effectively I replicate these “centralising” devices, the colonial legacies and power implications of the English language novel, traditionally a ‘privileged intellectual tool’[[575]](#footnote-576), risks positioning my protagonist, narrator or myself as author, as a central authority and thus re-marginalising Hong Kong. Either claiming to know and thus “represent” Hong Kong or, just as arrogantly, “permitting” the “local” to speak, my novel risks presenting Hong Kong as though it is in need of representation. To avoid such discursive arrogance, in this final chapter I analyse the most prominent genre of Anglophone Hong Kong writing; the adventure narrative, a genre which typically exemplifies latent colonial symbolic hierarchies and marginalising Orientalist imagery. It includes novels by James Clavell and John le Carré, but its central tropes are evident in more historically grounded work like Schoyer’s *The Typhoon’s Eye*, Mo’s *The Monkey King* and Lee Ding Fai’s *Running Dog*. This genre, writes Ho, is characterised by

the western protagonist-hero – and the odd heroine – becoming entangled with assorted spies, criminals, shady businessmen, corrupt policemen, and oriental sirens. Suave or muscular, world-weary and streetwise, the hero’s progress, though at times dubious, is never finally in serious doubt.[[576]](#footnote-577)

Analysing Martin Booth’s *Gweilo: Memories of a Hong Kong Childhood* (2005), a contemporary “neo-adventure” story, as the epitome of narrative arrogance, I develop a counter-methodology that interrogates rather than asserts the authority of the British writer in Hong Kong. I put this research into practice, embodying this self-interrogative narrative figure in my female, British protagonist, Anna, whose thoughts comprise the third person narrative, while attempting to negate these post-colonial narrative ‘pitfalls’.[[577]](#footnote-578)

Many Anglophone novels attempt a critique of imperialist power-structures, such as Coates’s *The Road*, Colquhoun’s *Filthy Rich* and Theroux’s *Kowloon Tong*. And yet, many of these novels, including Booth’s, covertly reinforce these inequalities through symbolic assertions of narrative authority. In *The Road*, for example, despite Coates’s deeply critical perspective on economic exploitation rife in colonial Hong Kong, his narrative ironically foregrounds the same ideas of difference between Western and Chinese “ways” that facilitate such exploitation. This is epitomized in a passage where his character, Richard, speaks to local boy, Ah Fai, after he is violently beaten by his father. ‘Acknowledging the truth’, that Ah Fai will likely ‘be killed’ if he returns to his village, the narrative lens flicks between the ‘half-dead’ boy and the ‘little temple, with its gods and guardians, bell and incense burners’ in which he has taken refuge. The narrator’s associative gaze here symbolically links the violence of the boy’s injuries with these cultural signifiers, covertly reinforcing ideas of Chinese barbarism.[[578]](#footnote-579) Furthermore, while he initially ignores the boy’s insistence: ‘Foreigners… are my destruction’, Richard then wonders if his ‘act of mercy’ is in fact an ‘intervention’. The idea of an intrinsic division between them, here, overrides Richard’s sympathy and his idea of their shared humanity. While, within the text, the road itself is a symbol of connection between locals and the colonizer, representing shared economic interest, the novel itself undermines this idea, presenting some divisions as ultimately irreconcilable. This same pattern is reflected in *Filthy Rich*, where ‘the familiar themes of eastern sensuality, the corruptive influence of the East and the dangers it poses are clearly visible despite some attempts at irony’,[[579]](#footnote-580) and in *Kowloon Tong*, about which Rambukwella writes: ‘the text is sharply critical of British xenophobia and Anglocentricism but at the same time seems unable to offer a positive portrayal of Chineseness’.[[580]](#footnote-581)

**The Hong Kong Adventure**

In *Gweilo*, despite frequent use of irony to critique xenophobia and cultural ignorance, Booth has been similarly unable to detach his work from this orientalist imagery and colonial power structures. This is particularly a problem of adventure writing. Ho’s analysis of Timothy Mo’s *The Monkey King* illuminates the problematic formulae that comprise typical Anglophone adventure narratives. She describes the novel as a ‘rehearsal of adventure stories of Mo’s childhood reading’: a ‘story of the fortunes of a young man who sets out in an unfamiliar world with little to rely on except his native wit, and wins in the end after fending off the numerous attacks of an arch-opponent’.[[581]](#footnote-582) This narrative arch is echoed in Booth’s autobiographical account of his Hong Kong childhood. Booth describes his past as ‘not unadventurous’ and likens his memories of Hong Kong to wartime cinema. From his initial departure from England, the child narrator sees the move as an ‘adventure’, positioning himself as an ‘explorer’ of the ‘ocean of sea water and endless possibilities’.[[582]](#footnote-583) Immersed in the alien environment, the narrator forms spatial and social maps by which he and the reader, presumed unfamiliar with Hong Kong, can navigate. Through the child-focaliser, Booth signposts the socio-economic structures, inequalities and cultural ignorance of the colonial society in which he grew up.

Booth’s narrative map, much like the Mercatorian map, derives ‘authority’ from its ‘ability to circumscribe geography, by enclosing, defining, coding, orienting, structuring, and controlling space’.[[583]](#footnote-584) In the style of the Nineteenth Century colonial adventurer, Booth asserts his control over Hong Kong by objectifying locals, and fixing identities, social territories and native/colonizer binaries. Booth’s narrator occupies the position of ‘hero [who] typically travel[s] away from England and civilisation into other lands whose savage inhabitants are inferior – morally, physically, economically – to the Anglo-Saxon adventurer’.[[584]](#footnote-585) The child’s impression of society reflects the ‘accepted ... basic distinction … between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”)’, that Edward Said outlines in *Orientalism.*[[585]](#footnote-586) While these binaries are also prevalent in Anglophone romance and historical novels such as Schoyer’s *The Typhoon’s Eye*, embodied in characters like Caroline Weitzel who is fearful of the “dangerous” locals whom her “civilising” anti-communist mission targets,[[586]](#footnote-587) adventure plots typically revolve around such ideas. Booth’s child narrator embodies this trope. First seeing Hong Kong as ‘wondrously strange’,[[587]](#footnote-588) he then manages this “strangeness”, learning how to navigate its complexities and dangers. As Said explains,

what [gives] the Oriental’s world its intelligibility and identity [is] not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient [is] identified by the West … In short, Orientalism [is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient [for] dealing with the orient- dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it’.[[588]](#footnote-589)

While the retrospective narrator remembers how he learned about Hong Kong, for example, when the elderly Chinese man offers to ‘teach’ him how to ‘understand’ the temple,[[589]](#footnote-590) he simultaneously “teaches” the reader, presumed unfamiliar with Hong Kong. By recounting this learning, and also juxtaposing this intervention with his own independent “discoveries”, this retrospective positioning presents the adult narrator, rather than the local, as ‘master’ of this space.

**The Contemporary Flâneur**

Like Suyin’s *A Many Splendoured Thing*, Booth’s novel can be read as a multi-layered narrative map, concerned with the relationship between subjectivity and space. In his somewhat removed reflections on the city he explores, Booth’s narrator embodies several characteristics of the Baudelairean flâneur, ‘an expert reader of urban signs’.[[590]](#footnote-591) As Boutin writes, ‘implicit in the trope of the flâneur’s visual mastery ... is a discourse of control, both over urban space and the city inhabitants’.[[591]](#footnote-592) The social positionality of Booth’s flâneur-type narrator stands in distinct contrast with that of other post-colonial era novels like Teju Cole’s narrator, Julius, in *Open City* (2011). Cole’s psychogeographical exploration of New York by a Nigerian migrant seeks to ‘redefine territorial mappings’,[[592]](#footnote-593) treating this redefinition as a critical component of postcolonial critique. The flâneur figure’s typical centrality in the narrative map provides Julius with a platform from which to negotiate his subaltern identity. In Booth’s text, however, it reinforces both the child and the adult narrator’s assumed ‘claim’[[593]](#footnote-594) over space, reinforcing colonial hierarchies. Subverting this symbolic centrality is a key concern of my creative work. I therefore draw on and manipulate this flâneur model to allow my own protagonist to negotiate gendered, racialised and discursive hierarchies that both facilitate and delimit her exploration of Hong Kong.

Several Hong Kong artists and critics have explored the extent to which ‘the era of globalization allows the kind of walking space that might liberate the contemporary flâneur from social space and social relations, traditionally defined’.[[594]](#footnote-595) In the Hong Kong context, Wong Kar-wai explores this idea most famously in his film *Chungking Express*, which contrasts with the false master narratives of globalism, post-colonialism and localism with lived experience of the city.[[595]](#footnote-596) While Wong’s role of ‘director-flâneur’ focalises the experience of ‘local people’, my own exploration of the ‘new freedoms offered by global flows’, questions how my protagonist is mobilised to interrogate the hierarchies that underpin her freedom, and how they intersect with identity politics that continue to trap the urban space and its representation.[[596]](#footnote-597) My ‘dual-flâneur’ structure facilitates this interrogation; I use multiple perspectives all of which “interpret” what the protagonist sees and experiences, and in so doing contradict and challenge one another. The protagonist not only watches and maps the city but also is watched and critiqued: by herself in the present and other temporal instances, and by the uncannily-close third person narrator.

**Mapping “Home” and “Away”**

Booth’s feelings of mastery over the space can be traced through a progressive blurring of the home and away binary. Phillips argues that in the traditional adventure narrative,

[these] two distant, disconnected spaces seem to have little to do with each other. And yet they are defined in terms of each other, and the boundaries between them are often blurred.[[597]](#footnote-598)

For Booth’s narrator, Hong Kong begins as an ‘away’ space of uncertainty and intrigue, promising a ‘new and wondrously strange life to come’.[[598]](#footnote-599) However, soon, the narrator feels the need to remind himself that when his ‘mother bought a curio or two to send home’, by ‘home’ she ‘meant ‘Britain’’.[[599]](#footnote-600) He then explains, ‘[while] all expatriates referred to the country of the origin as ‘home’ ... her outlook had subtly changed … she wanted to remain in Hong Kong’.[[600]](#footnote-601) The narrator then proudly mirrors this shift in his own use of the term, stating ‘for me, ‘back home’ meant an apartment on the peak with a world famous view, not a semi-detached [in] London’,[[601]](#footnote-602) which is now ‘as strange a place ... as Hong Kong had been on that June morning in 1952’.[[602]](#footnote-603) Through the eyes of the child, Hong Kong exemplifies the process by which, through the adventurer’s eyes, the away space eventually becomes ‘a different but thoroughly organised world ... with its own national, cultural, and epistemological boundaries and principles of internal coherence’.[[603]](#footnote-604) Booth learns to safely navigate this world. He survives The Walled City’s ‘maze of shanties and ancient buildings’,[[604]](#footnote-605) for example, by recognising unspoken rules, like the fact that Ho ‘never paid’ in the eating-place, which indicates to him that it is Ho’s ‘secret fraternity [that] held Kowloon Walled City in its thrall’.[[605]](#footnote-606) The child thus learns that befriending Ho will afford him protection.

This subversion of home and away, however, ironically reinforces the orientalist binary of strange and familiar; as Phillips argues, ‘the geography of adventure corresponds to ... a liminal space’, a ‘marginal, ambiguous region’.[[606]](#footnote-607) Though Hong Kong is now more home-like for the narrator, it is Hong Kong’s sustained strangeness that makes his acclimatisation remarkable for the reader. In order to impress with his mastery, Hong Kong must remain “master-able”, and is thus fixed as liminal. Hong Kong is positioned as a platform that exists only to showcase the narrator’s courage and progress. Writing that the New Territories ‘*meant* new horizons, new challenges and, more importantly, a new area to explore [my emphasis]’,[[607]](#footnote-608) Booth literally defines the space according to the child’s interests. Liminal spaces within Hong Kong metonymically embody this process, namely his house on ‘Boundary Street’, ‘a no man’s land’ which ‘marked the periphery between British Kowloon and the hinterland of the New Territories’,[[608]](#footnote-609) and ‘The Walled City’, an ‘excit[ing] fragment of ‘real’ China’,[[609]](#footnote-610) described as a ‘miniature state of its own’.[[610]](#footnote-611) Liminality promises ‘roman[ce] and … dange[r]’;[[611]](#footnote-612) as though it is a tourist attraction, Booth describes his mother’s prohibition of his exploration of The Walled City as ‘tantamount to buying him an entrance ticket’.[[612]](#footnote-613) The child’s attraction to these liminal spaces epitomises what Said describes as ‘vacillat[ion] between the West’s contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in- or fear of – novelty’;[[613]](#footnote-614) when The Walled City ceases to elude and frighten him, it ‘start[s] to lose its appeal’ and the narrator ‘stop[s] visiting’, searching ‘farther afield’.[[614]](#footnote-615)

**Narrative Authority**

Despite the subjective frameworks that underpin Booth’s map, his narrator’s centrality and partial detachment as flâneur presents the map as “true”. His subjective experience is at least more reliable than the real map that he symbolically drops into a drain grid’ after it fails to direct him to The Walled City. He decides instead: ‘from here on, I was to wander without direction, discovering what I could’.[[615]](#footnote-616) The child’s authority over the space is symbolised in his tendency to map from above, repeatedly occupying physical and narrative ‘vantage point[s]’; from the top of The Peak, he states ‘at my feet lay Hong Kong’,[[616]](#footnote-617) and ‘from ... the top deck’ of a tram, he

look[s] down on ... coolies and ricksaws, old crones pushing wheeled trollies ... Chinese school children ... amahs immaculate in black and white ... policemen in their khaki uniforms.[[617]](#footnote-618)

His panoramic perspective symbolises a narrative omniscience typical of colonial texts in which the ‘Oriental is *contained* and *represented* by the dominating frameworks’.[[618]](#footnote-619) Booth’s elevation is Booth literal and metaphoric, denoting a knowledge of Hong Kong that reinforces the ‘claim’ he makes to the space at the end of the novel.[[619]](#footnote-620)

Booth’s “authority” is magnified by his characterisation as ‘special’, or exceptionally insightful, underpinned by his youthfulness, having not yet learned the prejudices and apprehensions that limit his parents in their explorations. Emphatically opposing other gweilos who speak from a ‘strong foundation of ignorance’,[[620]](#footnote-621) the child claims to ‘understand’ Hong Kong, in a way that his parents never do. This insight is mapped spatially, gaining him ‘free access to hidden corners of the colony normally closed to a Gweilo, a ‘pale fellow’ like him’.[[621]](#footnote-622) His father’s wilful ignorance, for example, wishing to ‘drive round the New Territories. Not into them’,[[622]](#footnote-623) contrasts with the child’s desire to ‘be in the thick of it’.[[623]](#footnote-624) The narrator’s naivety, showcased early on in his ill-informed enquiries, such as ‘[w]hich one of the houses is ours?’ and ‘which ship is the HMS Tamar?’ in response to which his father calls him a ‘blithering idiot’, allows him to make new ‘realization[s about] the world ... with each port of call’.[[624]](#footnote-625) These realisations, untainted by adult prejudices, are thus positioned as “authentic”. The narrator’s access to a “truth” is epitomised when he lets his mother believe a naïve, romantic variation of a story about Amah Rock, withholding the darker narrative he has learnt for himself.[[625]](#footnote-626) Subverting the child/adult knowledge hierarchy, the combination of insight and self-restraint denotes the narrator’s maturity and magnifies his authority.

This self-assured style of narration is characteristic of earlier Hong Kong English language writing, such as Austin Coates’s *Myself a Mandarin,* an account of his role as a Special Magistrate in 1950’s Hong Kong. While aware of the pernicious socio-economic consequences of colonizer/colonized structural binaries, and apparently self-conscious of his own privileged positionality, Coates presumes to make “truth-telling” generalisations about Chinese culture and people in relation to the West. He writes, for example, ‘Chinese are not atheists in the Western sense… They are far more conscious than are most Westerners of a spirit world’.[[626]](#footnote-627) While Coates’ ‘self-assumed authority’ and ‘ethnographic lessons’, though ‘irksome and out-of-date’,[[627]](#footnote-628) may be partially excused as symptomatic of the time, Booth’s twenty-first century retrospective narrator displays a similar arrogance. Outdated assumptions and ways of representing the “other” are not confined within the limited perspective of the child but leak out into the framing narration.

Foregrounding the narrator’s “authentic” childhood insights, Booth disguises the fact that the narration is mediated and organised by the retrospective adult narrator. This adult perspective is evident only fleetingly, for example, in moments of adult humour, lost to the child character, like when he witnesses a sailor squeeze a Chinese woman’s buttocks, and remembers ‘wonder[ing] … if this was how one greeted all Chinese women’.[[628]](#footnote-629) While the adult narrator laughs at the child, he also “hides” behind this innocence, disguising a racially and sexually insensitive joke as a memory for which he cannot be held responsible. Similarly, when the child ‘collapse[s] into paroxysms of laughter’ at ‘Ah Choo’s’ name,[[629]](#footnote-630) the adult perspective laughs with the child, making a joke at Ah Choo’s expense. Through the guise of childhood innocence and ‘*gweilo* gullibility’,[[630]](#footnote-631) Booth patronises and mocks the locals, epitomised when he describes firecrackers used ‘to drive off devils, demons and the pantheon of other supernatural ne’er-do-wells which every Chinese believed occupied every spiritually inhabitable niche’.[[631]](#footnote-632) Here, Booth’s elevated register denotes the adult perspective, but the narrator is protected by the innocence of the experiencing-child. On one level, Booth demonstrates what Rota calls the ‘self-confidence’ of an author who ‘thinks that even his flaws will necessarily be of interest to others’, indicating his self-assumed centrality in the text.[[632]](#footnote-633) At the same time, Booth’s performance of his childhood blunders thus ironically re-centralises him as master of his experience. He distances himself from these flaws as though he is now above them, denotes his retrospective mastery of the space and his own experiences.

Ho explores a similar discursive centrality in narratives like Timothy Mo’s *The Monkey King*. Discussing his marginalised protagonist, Wallace, whose outsider positionality allows him to comment on Hong Kong life, Ho identifies a movement from margin to center and a gradual acquisition of ‘power and authority’.[[633]](#footnote-634) The marginality of Booth’s child-self is somewhat different; though the child sees himself as an adventurous minority figure struggling to integrate himself into the local Hong Kong population, from the very beginning he is a symbol of the social mobility and socio-economic privilege of the colonizer. Though Booth, through the lens of the child, points out the failure of other “gweilo” characters to recognise their privileged positionality, neither the child nor retrospective narrator consistently acknowledge their own. This is exemplified when the narrator discusses his mother’s charitable acts. For example, when she ‘str[ikes] a blow for Chinese rights’ in securing her housekeeper’s tenure, the narrator juxtaposes this with her selfish comment: ‘[w]e’ll still have Wong’s marvellous sponges’.[[634]](#footnote-635) Juxtaposing these two behaviours, Booth foregrounds his mother’s ignorance of the structural inequalities that make such a statement repulsive, and allow her to ‘play native’ when she chooses. However, this mediating retrospective narrator is conspicuously absent when, in a similarly ignorant statement, the child positions himself as more oppressed than local pickpockets, stating ‘we were bound by the rules that ruled the rulers and they were not’.[[635]](#footnote-636)

Furthermore, Booth magnifies racial and social hierarchies for dramatic effect, echoing ideas of his own racial exceptionalism. He focalises local intrigue in his blonde hair and “gweilo” appearance, epitomised when ‘a crowd’ that ‘gather[s]’ to see ‘the spectacle of a blond European boy sitting at a dai pai dong alone of an evening’, calling it ‘more than most could resist’, and explaining ‘[t]he traffic slowed then stopped[,] [a] jam began to form’.[[636]](#footnote-637) Furthermore, Booth directly links the child’s racial exceptionalism with his ability to map Hong Kong, describing his blonde hair as a ‘passport’: first, ‘to many a nook and cranny of Chinese life’, and, secondly, ‘to security’ as he navigates the space.[[637]](#footnote-638) His sense of superiority leads the narrator to assume the authority of knowing what locals are thinking, reflecting that they are ‘no doubt perceiving [his] blonde hair and anticipating many brief daily encounters with good fortune’.[[638]](#footnote-639) Here, the child’s fascination and enjoyment at suddenly being a ‘spectacle’ because of his ‘lucky golden hair’ inferably echoes the author’s own, a covert “gweilo pride” encapsulated in the novel’s title. As Ho writes, ‘*Golden Boy*, the American title of *Gweilo*, actually throws light on the novel’s latent Orientalism’.[[639]](#footnote-640) While Booth’s pretext states that “Gweilo” is ‘Chinese slang for a European male ... Once a derogatory or vulgar term, referring to a European’s pale skin, [but now] a generic form expression’, he “re-claims” the word for his novel’s title, symbolically subverting prejudicial hierarchies that he only ever benefits from.

**A Methodological Response to ‘Meta-Ignorance’**

Overlooking his own privileged positionality and the discursive effects of his own constructions of identity, Booth exemplifies what Jose Medina calls ‘meta-ignorance’.[[640]](#footnote-641) She describes ‘hermeneutical difficultly privileged whites have in recognizing and making sense’ of the effects of their ‘racial insensitivity’ as well as ‘their own racialized identities, experiences, and social position’.[[641]](#footnote-642) The “difficulty” Booth has acknowledging his positionality is magnified by the fact that his narrative structure – the naïve boy who becomes the master – *depends upon* this active erasure of his ignorance. As the child learns to understand the foreign space, he “learns” to master the societal structures that leave his parents floundering, using locals as mouthpieces to affirm that he is ‘no like ovver gweilo boy’.[[642]](#footnote-643) Booth’s ongoing complicity in structural inequalities thus threatens this learning arc. Booth’s tactful evasion of his complicity in discursive inequalities ‘is not a passive lack of knowledge but rather a practice that is actively reproduced by individual subjects’.[[643]](#footnote-644)

My dual-flâneur methodology counters this ‘meta-ignorance’. While Boehmer argues that ‘creative writing like all art, seeks to know something better and to communicate that knowledge to the reader’, my novel seeks to communicate my protagonist’s, narrator’s, and my own *inability* to know. Where “knowing”, for Booth’s narrator, constitutes mastery of space and the ability to distance himself from the ignorance he condemns in others, the only “knowledge” my protagonist and narrator gain is that they are unable to fully overcome their own ignorance. Boehmer explains that ‘[f]or postcolonial writing, that truth involves expressing and embodying in an intensive, self-coherent way that particularity or distinctiveness of the conditions from which writing springs’.[[644]](#footnote-645) For British writers, writing in the Hong Kong context, these conditions are underpinned by post-colonial inequalities. My narrative responds to Said’s argument that, ‘it needs to be made clear about cultural discourse and exchange within a culture that what is commonly circulated by it is not “truth” but representations’,[[645]](#footnote-646) and that the lingering post-colonial condition amplifies some representation above others.

**Disorganising Space**

“Unmapping”, writes Phillips, ‘is to denaturalise geography, hence, to undermine world views that rest upon it’ while ‘[m]etaphorically, ... means denaturalising more abstract constructs, such as race and gender, which are mapped in imaginative geography’.[[646]](#footnote-647) Conscious of the notion that ‘[t]he postcolonial novel ... constantly routes and reroutes, even as it rewrites, the centre of cultural authority, or tradition’,[[647]](#footnote-648) my narrator contends with ‘the relationship of the writer or the intellectual to the people’[[648]](#footnote-649) explicitly. The narrator addresses the ‘learned’ prejudices towards the mainland that Anna has acquired from Hong Kong people, and “observes” her ‘frowning at suitcases, and shoeprints on toilet seats’, the narrator acknowledges that she knows these ideas are ‘reductive’ but feels ‘a pressure to believe [them]’.[[649]](#footnote-650) Though Anna knows that these pressures ‘shouldn’t’ affect her judgement and ‘tries to make herself patient and calm and accepting’,[[650]](#footnote-651) the verb ‘tries’ implies her attempts are unsuccessful. While the narrator’s attention exposes the falseness of prejudicial local narratives, she simultaneously destabilises Anna’s ability to make judgements, unable to control her own behavioural responses to ideations she knows to be false. As Anna is unable to organise ideas of identity in her own mind, my narrative that focalises her thoughts thus ‘disorganises’ rather than organises the socio-political space. Mary Louise Pratt argues, ‘if all [a writer] has to work with are inherited European discourses’, they must use them in ‘consciously inauthentic ways ... deliberately misappropriating and disorganizing metropolitan discourses of travel, geography and ethnography’.[[651]](#footnote-652)

The ability to disorganise is facilitated, in part, by Anna’s intersectional identity; though her post-colonial socio-economic privilege affords her the mobility and centrality of ethnographer, she is also a solo female traveller navigating a typically masculine space.(Boehmer, 2005; Butler 2000; Enloe, 1989, 2000) Ho outlines the emergence of a similar ‘formula that inverts traditional ethno-racial and gender arrangements’ in the romance genre of Hong Kong writing since 1997. She writes that by ‘displacing the Western male protagonist of adventure-romance, it privileges instead women of mixed ancestry and cosmopolitan experience’. Giving Janice Y.K. Lee’s *The Piano Teacher* (2009) as an example, she identifies how ‘the ‘Eurasian outcast, Trudy … makes use of her in-between identity’ to interrogate the ‘simplistic notion of colonizer-British versus colonized-Chinese’. [[652]](#footnote-653) Building on this technique, my protagonist’s gender offsets her “power” as post-colonial explorer of the urban space, providing a counter position to ‘the patriarchal legacies embedded within ... postcolonial literature’. However, as a British expatriate, belonging to a privileged minority, she can achieve this only partially. Simultaneously embodying and subject to discursive authority, she is effectively positioned to ‘interrupt the duologue of colonial master and [space]’,[[653]](#footnote-654) while at the same time highlighting ‘the political problems of organising space’.[[654]](#footnote-655)

1. **The “Flâneuse” and the Post-colonial City**

Increasing attention has been given to the gendering of place in contemporary scholarship, particularly within the field of psychogeography. Elizabeth Wilson discusses how the city has both “masculine” and “feminine” characteristics, writing that ‘the city is “masculine” in its triumphal scale, its towers and vistas and arid industrial regions; it is “feminine” in its enclosing embrace, in its indeterminacy and labyrinthine uncenterness’.[[655]](#footnote-656) Writers and film-makers from Han Suyin, in *A Many Splendoured Thing* to Sofia Coppola, in *Lost in Translation* (2003), have demonstrated how foregrounding these “feminine” energies can be used to disrupt the typically “masculine” narratives of post-colonial nation-building and globalisation. Ngai Pun, Wu Ka-ming, Eliza Wing-Yee Lee and Agnes S. Ku have discussed the gendered narratives that continue to delimit and define “Hong Kong identity”, evident, for example, in citizenship legislation biased against mothers from the mainland.[[656]](#footnote-657) While my protagonist’s socio economic privilege means that her identity is not confined by many of these trappings, as solo female traveller in the masculine space, she is also never entirely “free” of patriarchal superstructures. Alexander Greer Hartwiger describes how Teju Cole’s German-Nigerian immigrant narrator, Julius, occupies an ‘insider/outsider’ position, as a ‘well-educated psychiatrist’ who is also marginalised by his ‘complex genealogy’.[[657]](#footnote-658) Hartwiger explains,

at once a part of New York’s cosmopolitan society and apart from it ... Julius resembles the figure of the nineteenth-century flâneur but with an added critical lens that enables him to engage with the politics of a post- “War on Terror” world’.[[658]](#footnote-659)

Julius exercises the privilege of critical distance; straddling social hemispheres, undertakes a subversive ‘study [of] new patterns of relationships between organisms and their environments’.[[659]](#footnote-660)

Murphy writes, ‘the condition of [the flâneur’s] ultimate mobility and freedom’, is the flâneur’s ability to be ‘incognito’ as he chooses.[[660]](#footnote-661) Murphy cites Baudelaire’s 1863 idea that

to be away from home, and yet to feel at home; to behold the world, to be in the midst of the world and yet to remain hidden from the world ... are some of the minor pleasures of [the] independent, ... observer[;] a prince who always rejoices in his incognito. [[661]](#footnote-662)

While Julius’s education and social-respectability allows him to partially “overcome” the socio-political constrictions of his race and ethnicity to undertake a ‘transgressive wandering’,[[662]](#footnote-663) my protagonist remains constricted by her gender. Anna’s race and gender make her doubly conspicuous both to locals and herself, and she is constantly contending with her racialisation and felt vulnerability. Anna’s visibility is magnified by her gendered interactions with other characters. For example, Kallum’s overt desire to demonstrate his “masculine” fearlessness in the face of triad attacks contrasts with Anna’s “feminine” nurturing qualities, warning him away from ‘danger’ and to ‘stop … now [his] point is made’, causing Kallum to reflect ‘you are sounding like my mother’.[[663]](#footnote-664) Despite Anna being his senior, Kallum patronises her, both for showing emotion and her ignorance to nuanced aspects of Hong Kong’s pro-democracy politics, thus reinforcing a gender hierarchy. Their parallel aversion to their mothers magnifies their opposite genders; Kallum is enraged by his and Christine’s differences (his activism and her political apathy), Anna by her and her mother’s similarities. They look alike, for example, which makes it difficult to distance herself from her mother’s constant inferences that their appearance makes them “special” as spectacles or targets. Later in this chapter, I discuss how Anna’s aversion to her mother reflects a symbolic rejection of their shared “mother tongue” and “motherland”. For now, however, I elaborate how her heightened visibility as female means she is unable to fully experience the post-colonial idea of the ‘urban [as] liberating’.[[664]](#footnote-665) While, like the Baudelairean flâneur, Anna ‘feels at home’ at times,[[665]](#footnote-666) this feeling is unsettled by the uncanniness; she is never able to hide and cannot therefore “rule” the space with the confidence of the Baudelairean “prince”, but can only interrogate and disorganise.

1. **An “Unadventurous” Narrative**

My neo-adventure framework facilitates this disorganisation. As Phillips states,

the cultural space created by geographical narratives such as adventure stories, not always confining the imagination to entrenched ways of thinking, to conservative constructions of geography and identity, is a point of departure from which it is possible to deconstruct and reconstruct, unmap and remap geographical and social worlds.[[666]](#footnote-667)

My narrative builds on a foundation of literature that remaps this entrenched binary of adventurous hero who undertakes a ‘journey in quest of riches’ to ‘an exotic setting’,[[667]](#footnote-668) encountering and then controlling the ‘villainous’ or dangerous “other”. Frances describes R. L. Stevenson’s *The Ebb Tide* as one of such novels that undertakes a ‘conscious reversal’ of conventions of the genre, ‘employ[ing], and then intentionally subvert[ing] ... prevalent colonial adventure tropes’.[[668]](#footnote-669) She states that ‘by manipulating the tropic framework he presents a disturbingly universal depiction of villainy which applies as easily to the adventurers as to those they seek to control’.[[669]](#footnote-670) The trope of local ‘villainy’ is overt in Booth’s *Gweilo*, however this idea is covertly echoed in the language of Western tourists and immigrants I interviewed. Beginning with the imagery used to describe locals, I draw on Stevenson’s model of first illuminating and then deconstructing these entrenched ideations in my own creative methodology.

These prejudicial ideas are exemplified in Booth’s use of dehumanising language to describe locals. For example, describing the hotel gardener’s animalistic behaviour, he characterises him as ‘fiercely territorial’, coming at them with ‘a vicious-looking curved pruning knife’ and ‘all the mobility of a mongoose’, ‘grunt[ing] unintelligibly ... in a bestial language’, and claiming he ‘would have maimed or killed’ them.[[670]](#footnote-671) This lexis of violence is magnified in the description of his haunting appearance:

[H]is face like that of a skull. The skin drawn tightly over the bines and his eyes sunken, he had the temper of a demon’.[[671]](#footnote-672)

Furthermore, the narrator then uses this typecast of the threatening local as an excuse for his own discursive and physical violence. For example, when a homeless local woman lets her ‘rags’ brush across his face, he feels ‘no pity for her’ when ‘a gang of Chinese boys pel[t] her with gravel’, reflecting ‘she had defiled me’ by ‘touch[ing his] golden hair’.[[672]](#footnote-673) My interview participants similarly use physical appearance to map social relations and denote the apparent threat of locals. Like Booth’s narrator, my interviewee, Karen, uses her blond hair to emphasise her difference from locals, stating, ‘we were two blonde women in the middle of something that I didn't know and didn't understand … that's what I found threatening’.[[673]](#footnote-674) Here, Karen disguises her racialised assumptions behind code words like ‘blond’ and ‘Western’, and uses this idea of difference to justify her feelings of threat.

Alternatively, in Booth’s novel and my interview transcripts, when locals cannot be fit into this ‘threatening’ typecast, they are appropriated according to transplanted value structures. For example, Booth describes his family’s cook, Wong, as ‘utterly superb, with the attentiveness of a high-class butler, the culinary skills if not of Escoffier then certainly of his sous chef ... and the mien of a true gentleman’s gentleman’.[[674]](#footnote-675) Assessing Wong’s utility compared to Western standards of excellence, this description also connotes his surprise at Wong’s aptitude, patronising him and covertly reinforcing ideas of the locals’ inferiority. This discursive trait is evident in my interview with Karen. She states, ‘the old people really stuck in my mind ... an old lady sat beside me and I offered her some [orange] and she was just so pleasant and happy that I'd offered her this orange!’ Karen’s fixation on this mundane fact demonstrates her shock at the local woman’s friendliness and humanity. Like Booth, Karen uses similarly patronising terminology to describe not only locals and local places, but also other racial minorities like the Filipino community. Describing them as ‘little’, she confines them to liminality, describing the ‘little sectioned-off spaces’ where they sit, ‘little villages’, ‘little communit[ies]’, discursively positioning herself as superior. She also physically positions herself as a target of local gazes, wondering ‘whether people were looking at us thinking 'rich people’, and stating ‘they were so inquisitive about what we looked like, because they'd not had that exposure’.[[675]](#footnote-676) Both Karen and Booth’s narrator’s positioning of locals and “Westerners” or ‘blond’ people (categories used synonymously) reinforce the Orientalist idea of the West as more civilised, more culturally advanced, and a privilege to be “exposed to”.

In my narrative, I overtly “unmap” these ideations. This “unmapping” of preconceived models of identity builds on a emergent trope within post-1997 writing about Hong Kong, outlined by Ho. Giving Janice Y. K. Lee’s *The Piano Teacher* (2009) as an example, she describes the female British protagonist as ‘an ingénue figure who discovers that her Orientalist preconceptions are inadequate to the complexities of her colonial situation … largely seen through the lens of identity’.[[676]](#footnote-677) In my narrative, I expose a *temptation* to revert to these orientalist models when Anna feels alienated, or uncertain, in order to work towards changing these discursive habits. For example, in the beginning of my novel, the third person narrator focalises Anna’s initial impressions of the alien Hong Kong landscape. These impressions echo clichéd ‘terms that supposedly capture Chinese cultural essence- ‘face’, ‘joss’, ‘fungshui’’, well-established by writers like Clavell.[[677]](#footnote-678) However, while, in the beginning of the novel, the Anna of 2014 focuses on ‘jade hills’, ‘Fai Chun and dracaena’ and ‘webbed-bamboo scaffold’,[[678]](#footnote-679) as the novel progresses, her observations become underpinned by retrospective awareness that she was echoing stereotypes. This self-consciousness is epitomised in Anna’s views on the threat posed by local men, a paranoia which consistently proves to be unjustified. First, in the taxi to Anna’s village, she panics that the taxi driver has trapped her and struggles with the handle, only to find he needs to open the safety catch.[[679]](#footnote-680) Similarly, when she takes a deserted stairwell at the back of Chung King Mansions, she is “chased-out” by nothing more than the sound of the door shifting in its frame.[[680]](#footnote-681) This unjustified fear is epitomised in her consistent speculation about ‘triad-men’.[[681]](#footnote-682) Elaine Yee Lin Ho identifies this as a particular Orientalist character trope: the ‘Triad’, who ‘ensnares’ the son of Dirk Struan, the hero of Clavell’s *Tai-Pan*.[[682]](#footnote-683) Despite Anna’s best efforts, she never proves the triad, who appears to be stalking her, responsible for Kallum’s disappearance. Eventually recognising her habit of ‘forc[ing]’ locals into character tropes and ‘weaving their lives into a story they’d never read’, she reflects how ‘in her story there were no accidents, everything tied into neat little endings’,[[683]](#footnote-684) resentful and patronising of her own narrativization.

Recognising her own prejudice, and “seeing through” her attempts to correct this flawed perspective, the narrator focalises Anna’s transformation into her own post-colonial critic, deconstructing her own habitual use of Orientalist imagery. This method is exemplified in a scene on the MTR train in which Anna and a local man survey each other through the reflections in opposite train windows. The narrator closely focalises Anna’s reaction to the man’s ‘ghostlike’ appearance and ‘empty … sockets where eyes should have been’. While she is at first threatened, she then recognises that ‘her own flesh must look the same’ and that it is the reflection in the glass that makes their faces ‘mask-like, empty and ghoulish’.[[684]](#footnote-685) Acknowledging her own entrenched patterns of thought, Anna’s narrative deconstructs these orientalist ideas of identity. This technique echoes a trope that Ho identifies as emergent in post-1997 gothic Hong Kong fiction, where ‘expatriate narrators’, under the guise of ‘knowing about the Chinese’, misrepresent Chinese characters. She explains that ‘this representation, in turn, enables the marginalized Chinese stereotypes … to appear as by-products of the expatriates’ own disoriented psychological geography’.[[685]](#footnote-686) Anna therefore self-consciously showcases her own disorientation, symbolised when the sudden darkness of a tunnel makes ‘the inside of the carriage [appear] outside [the glass]’; Anna’s thoughts become ‘outside’ too as she is forced to contend with her methods of interpreting the man’s image and her own narrative unreliability. While Bruno Zerweck typifies the unreliable narrator as one who ‘“without being aware of it, […] continually give[s] the reader indirect information about their idiosyncrasies and state of mind”’,[[686]](#footnote-687) my third person narrator foregrounds not only Anna’s perspective skews but also her realisation that she can never realise their extent. Anna and the narration are thus caught in a continual introspective cycle, symbolised in the focalisation of Anna’s infinitely regressing study of reflections.

Anna is similarly self-conscious of the effects of language in her English language conversations with locals. My transcription of Mr Wang’s speech addresses the discursive effects of representing the English of non-native speakers and authorial positionality. As Holger Kersten writes, ‘nonstandard language often conjures up assumptions of racial inferiority’, whereby ‘the command of the dominant language (standard English) signifie[s] full cultural competence and social prestige’.[[687]](#footnote-688) Conscious that she is forcing Mr Wang to communicate outside of his native language, she ‘feels suddenly guilty’ when she finds him struggling to express the nuances of his opinions about the democracy protests in English. She finds him,

scrambling with the language she has forced him to use[, s]he feels his Cantonese words bubbling, quashed by his knowledge that Anna wouldn’t understand a single word.

She reflects, ‘[h]is frustration makes her wish she’d never spoken.[[688]](#footnote-689) My representation of Mr Wang’s speech, using fragmented English (‘‘[m]y speaking not foreign- not En’lish, okay. Can’t saying’’), replicates Anna’s initial impression of him as a two-dimensional character, whom she remembers for his poor English.[[689]](#footnote-690) However, recognising that he is actually accommodating her inability to speak Cantonese, she realises that her own lingual capability is inferior to his, and her characterisation of him becomes much more complex. Moreover, Mr Wong’s inability to fully express the complexity of his thoughts makes Anna recognise that his insight, socio-critical awareness, and passion, is far superior to her own. He is able to express more about the protests in a second language than Anna is in her first, pointing out, for example, that Anna has walked past ongoing protests in Mong Kok every evening without realising.[[690]](#footnote-691) Anna becomes conscious that she had initially perceived Mr Wang as a ‘caricature’,[[691]](#footnote-692) treating him as ‘object in the midst of other objects’ and is now forced to contend with frameworks that she ‘did not know [she] imposed ... on him’.[[692]](#footnote-693) Her self-confrontation thus subverts the adventure framework of self-discovery from one achieved through the superiority of explorer, to one in which the explorer recognises their participation in social and discursive hierarchies.

**A Journey of Self-*re*discovery**

Guy-Ernest Debord writes,

[t]he research that we are thus led to undertake on the arrangement of elements of the urban setting in close relation with the sensations they provoke entails bold hypotheses that must [be] constantly corrected in the light of experience, by critique and self critique.[[693]](#footnote-694)

Unlike traditional adventure narratives, my novel is structured around two parallel explorations of Hong Kong combined in a single narrative; the first in 2014 and the second in 2017, in which the narrator reflects critically on or “disorganises” Anna’s experience. Mary Louise Pratt argues that, ‘decolonizing requires that one pass not around but through the subject producing discourses of the metropole’.[[694]](#footnote-695) Embodying this self-critique, by physically revisiting the sites of her initial exploration of Hong Kong, Anna literally and figuratively “passes through” her own subject producing processes. While texts like Coetzee’s *Foe* have returned to existing colonial narratives to rewrite them, my narrative focalises Anna’s revisiting of her own colonising discursive habits. The narrator thus exemplifies the responsibility of post-colonial British writers who must recognise ongoing structural inequalities that our own texts risk reproducing.

As Jørgensen and Phillips argue, ‘[i]n order to identify the taken-for-granted naturalised ascriptions of meaning, researchers need to distance themselves from them in some way’.[[695]](#footnote-696) My plot and narrative structure facilitates this distancing to allow what Debord calls ‘a renovated cartography’,[[696]](#footnote-697) as Anna “renovates” her initial map of meanings. There is firstly temporal distance between Anna’s two journeys to Hong Kong. While re-living her memories, the narrator is always conscious of Anna’s subsequent discoveries and events that shape how she now perceives past choices and actions. For example, while remembering a private tutoring lesson, in which she ‘praises her student loudly so [the student’s] mother will hear their progress from the study’, my retrospective narrator focalises Anna’s present knowledge: ‘know[ing] now what she couldn’t have then: that Christine is too distracted to notice’.[[697]](#footnote-698) Having since learned that Christine was expecting her son home, the narrator judges Anna’s self-interestedness more harshly in relation to Christine’s anxiety.[[698]](#footnote-699) Furthermore, this hindsight causes Anna to project her knowledge of things that happened after certain experiences onto the memory of those experiences as she “re-lives” them. For example, knowing that when she gets lost in Mong Kok she will soon meet Kallum, around whom the novel’s plot revolves, she imagines that the gaze of a local vendor

follows her now, through the years in between them… as though he could see what Anna couldn’t have then, that she’d be back three years later, searching for someone she hadn’t known she would meet.[[699]](#footnote-700)

Reframing Anna’s past with retrospective “knowledge”, focalised through an intensely close third-person narrator, the thoughts of this past instance of Anna are laced with an uncanny awareness of the consequences of her actions both literal and symbolic. This hyper-awareness causes her to scrutinise the effect of every gesture and observation she makes.

**Memory Maps**

Anna navigates the present according to connections between memories and affective associations that are unplanned and temporally illogical. As Barry Curtis argues, a city’s ‘“matrix of routes, junctions, and structures” ... “function as a compelling metaphor for memory”’ because of the multiplicitious routes the urban explorer can take, and the unexpected encounters such a matrix creates.[[700]](#footnote-701) It is the symbolic and emotional significance of sites that guide her around Hong Kong. For example, a memory of Kallum makes Anna think of his sister, Claudi, and she finds herself returning to the school where they worked together despite the fact that ‘[s]he hadn’t really planned to come here’.[[701]](#footnote-702) The school triggers the memory of sensationalised ideas about mainland China as ‘unforgiving’ that circulated amongst her co-workers[[702]](#footnote-703), and the narrative shifts to the 2014 Occupy central protests against mainland intervention.[[703]](#footnote-704) The narrative thus maps Anna’s thought processes rather than Hong Kong, reflecting what Pietrzak-Franger, Pleβke and Voigts identify as the flâneur’s ability to take in ‘atmospheres sensually’ rather than through objective emplacements.[[704]](#footnote-705)

Though the typical flâneur is often characterised by emotional detachment, Pietrzak-Franger, Pleβke and Voigts write that ‘emotionalisation of the urban space’ contains the potential to ‘destabilise conventional narratives of mapping the city and thereby disrupt the power dynamics that entrap the metropolis’.[[705]](#footnote-706) The flâneur’s emotionalisation is also exemplified in *Open City*, as Julius affectively negotiates complex intersections of race, place and history. Julius’s emotional connection to space is exemplified when he encounters a sign announcing the closure of a Blockbuster video rental store; he writes, ‘it wasn’t that I felt sorry for these faceless national corporations ... but I was touched ... at the passage of these fixtures in my mental landscape’.[[706]](#footnote-707) For Julius, his emotional revelation is triggered by this sudden and unexpected reminder of the ‘swiftness’ of urban transformations and the ‘dispassion’ with which the global market swallows up enterprises[[707]](#footnote-708); dispassionate towards the space itself, his reflections are internal. Like Julius, Anna’s urban explorations reflect her own cognitive development but denote little of geographical or cultural significance. For example, as she revisits Tai Po train station and notices that a shop keeper who used to ‘gur[n]’ at her is no longer in business, the narrator reflects; ‘she doesn’t miss his glare, just the version of herself who had felt this glare so harshly’.[[708]](#footnote-709) Concerned primarily with the passage of time the shopkeeper’s absence represents, this type of narrative emplacement illuminates Anna’s cognitive state more than it does the shopkeeper. Like Julius, my narrator is less concerned with representing spaces “as they are” than the subjective reflection the external world inspires. When ‘the space pours itself into the mold in [Anna’s] mind’ and the narrator adds ‘only then does she recognise its shape’,[[709]](#footnote-710) this idea reminds readers that Anna is unable to represent the space objectively, thus undermining any implied authority as map-maker.

Furthermore, the distance between past and present disrupts Anna’s interaction with “reality”. Though the physical environment has changed in her absence, Anna still interacts with the space as she remembers it. For example, the narrator comments that, ‘though the potholes have been filled, [she] finds herself weaving to avoid them, side-stepping rectangles and the sandbags still vomiting sludge into the gutter’.[[710]](#footnote-711) As Debord writes,

the introduction of alternations such as more or less arbitrarily transposing maps of two different regions, can contribute to clarifying certain wanderings that express not subordination to randomness but complete insubordination to habitual influences.[[711]](#footnote-712)

As Anna uses her memory ‘map’ of the past to navigate the present, her movement foregrounds the habits and behavioural patterns she has acquired. In this case, Anna’s behaviour as if roadworks are still present demonstrates her lingering fixation with them, as she associates them with triad attacks, Kallum’s village, the protests (when they use roadwork debris to block the highway). The incongruity between these two ‘maps’ illuminates how Anna’s affectivity distorts her experience of and interactions with reality.

As Hodgkin and Radstone explain, since ‘memory is tied to place, ... many of its moments of disjuncture and complexity are associated with changes in a place, registering the uncanniness of being at once the same and different, at once time and space’.[[712]](#footnote-713) Her experience of uncanniness and the destabilising effect on her subjectivity is epitomised when she returns to the village and compulsively repeats ‘I used to live here’,[[713]](#footnote-714) not only to convince the driver but as if reassuring herself. This uncanniness forces her to question her relationship to these memories and the space, past and present. For example, when she observes a new house which ‘was a shell: gaping sockets in breezeblock, rusting iron stiches’ but is now home to a family,[[714]](#footnote-715) the shock challenges her sense of permanence and her taken-for-granted ability to “preserve” the space in her memory. Recognising that it has changed without her knowledge or permission, her unconscious possessiveness is foregrounded and shaken, leaving her unsure whether she wants to be seen or disappear.[[715]](#footnote-716)

Anna’s feelings of displacement from her former “home” underpin its partial transformation back into an “away” space. It becomes a space of ‘hybridity’, which “demands that [a subject] translate[s] [her/his] principles, rethink[s] them, extend[s] them”’.[[716]](#footnote-717) By disturbing Anna’s feeling of belonging and knowing, her reliability and authority as mapper of space is challenged. As Chawla and Atay write, ‘[p]ostcolonial subjects are destined to experience home spaces as uncanny/unfamiliar/unhomely because of the various ways that their own identities are amalgamations that arise in the interstices of interactions and experiences’.[[717]](#footnote-718) Murphy expands on this argument, stating that ‘in a global world no one is ever allowed to really be at “home” either literally or figuratively’.[[718]](#footnote-719) This hybrid space illuminates Anna’s simultaneous experiences as insider and outsider meaning she can question her own positionality and map of meanings without ever settling in an authoritative position , allowing for ‘the formation of new authority structures and “… [the] negotiation of meaning and representation”’.[[719]](#footnote-720)

**Renegotiating Positionality**

The character of Anna’s mother, the British tourist who comes to visit the “away space” of Hong Kong, catalyses the interrogation of Anna’s own positionality. Her mother magnifies Anna’s simultaneous insider/outsider positionality: while Anna is an “outsider” compared to local people, she is an “insider” compared with her visiting mother. When she imagines her mother thinking of Hong Kong as ‘*so different from home*’, on one hand, she is patronising of her mother’s desire for the ‘safety’ this English home represents. At the same time, Anna’s mother reminds her that this English home is also Anna’s. She remembers ‘starting to feel like the tourist, having features pointed out to her, like she otherwise wouldn’t have noticed’.[[720]](#footnote-721) Anna’s resentment of this reminder manifests in her cutting language. Her mother brands Hong Kong as ‘*authentic*’, ‘*a mystery*’ and ‘bizarre’, and gathers cultural details as though they are ‘trinkets’, proof of her adventurousness.[[721]](#footnote-722) The narrator reflects, ‘[her mother] will file them in her mind to be shared amongst colleagues once she is safely back in a world she understands’,[[722]](#footnote-723) suggesting that she understands more of Hong Kong than her mother. This rivalry reflects another variation of the emergent use of expatriate characters in gothic Hong Kong; Ho writes that ‘expatriate narrators and characters … rival each other in being more local or more knowing about the Chinese’. Just like habitual use of stereotype, this claimed “knowledge” reflects nothing more than characters’ own ‘disoriented psychological geography’.[[723]](#footnote-724)

Anna’s complex relationship with her mother in Hong Kong is symbolic of her relationship to both the “mother-tongue” and “motherland” they share.[[724]](#footnote-725) Boehmer writes that ‘[t]he image of the mother invites connotations of origins – birth, hearth, home, roots, the umbilical cord – and rests upon the frequent, and some might say ‘natural’, identification of the mother with the beloved earth ... the first-spoken language’.[[725]](#footnote-726) Her mother reminds her of the identity she wishes to escape, both the ‘tourist’ status she sought to shed in her first year, and their shared relative socio-economic and discursive privilege. This shared identity is magnified by her mother’s constant verbal reminders of their shared aesthetics, race and gender, as she positions herself and Anna as either admired by the locals or objects of their gaze. She embodies Mann’s argument that ‘the mother’s projections of her self-representation onto the adolescent can increase the internal conflict of an already troubled sense of newly acquired ... identity’.[[726]](#footnote-727) Presented with a mirror of her identity, Anna is forced to question her assumed “insider” status in Hong Kong and face her unconscious discursive habits as an “outsider”, including Orientalist imagery and ethnic chauvinism.

As Anna re-explores Hong Kong, flashes of her mother’s behaviours not only remind her of past mirroring but act as signposts that guide Anna’s self-reflection in the present. This multi-layered self-reflection is exemplified in the following passage:

her mother’s fresh intrigue became irritating. Peals of delight made Anna snappy and resentful of the details that had ceased to excite her… The everyday litter that Anna had been drowning in, her mother acknowledged to existence. She spoke them to life.[[727]](#footnote-728)

For the retrospective narrator, the final sarcastic rebuke is also tinged with sincerity; memories of her mother’s ideations reanimate the space, lubricating Anna’s interrogation of her interaction with Hong Kong. The memory of her mother’s ignorance of the symbolic effects of her behaviour and language fuels Anna’s paranoia about her own ongoing ignorance. Within this complex space, Anna is unable to anchor her positionality, and, embodies Mann’s child who ‘may attempt to disengage from his or her mother due to the threat of merging with her’.[[728]](#footnote-729) Anna seeks to distance herself from this identity of ignorance in the present by adopting an intensely self-conscious perspective.

Her self-conscious reflection of her positionality plays out in interactions with locals and other migrants. For example, remembering a fragmented and inconsequential conversation with a local woman on a bus, in which she gives vague and ill-informed answers to the woman’s enquires about Scotland, the narrator studies the relationship between the woman and Anna’s former- and present-selves. This is exemplified in the following passage, when the woman asks if people in Scotland wear kilts:

Anna wonders for how long that question has troubled her, if perhaps she had debated its truth amongst friends. She hoped the woman would tell them about the girl on the bus. Anna’s was the horse’s mouth and she had never even been to Scotland, but she decided not to ruin her authenticity with the truth.

There is nothing more for either of them to say, though Anna remembers feeling happy, like a thread had grown between them. The woman seems to feel it too, but Anna can’t be sure.

She doubts, now, that the woman still remembers her face. That detail she had offered, having satisfied a niggle, would have faded once more.[[729]](#footnote-730)

Unlike Booth’s narrator, whose authoritative distance leads him to assume his own significance in the lives of locals, the narrator focalises Anna’s realisation that she was nothing more than an answer to a question. She recognises the disconnection between the woman and herself; the woman is mistaken about Anna’s ‘authenticity’, and Anna can only speculate about the woman’s life and thoughts. At the same time however, despite this mutual ignorance of one another’s identities, Anna “feels” an emotional connection between them that transgresses lingual and cultural boundaries. These contrasting feelings of connection and disconnection produce a map that refuses definite direction for the reader. Like Cole’s Julius, who ‘never offers any self-reflective commentary that would assist readers in understanding the implications’ of his ‘stories’,[[730]](#footnote-731) Anna’s memories only trigger further inconclusive reflections, and the narrative thus resists authoritatively guiding the reader.

**Decentralising the Postcolonial Flâneur**

Unlike Booth’s narrator who explores in order to ‘understand’, my narrator explores Anna’s inability to do so. My novel thus counteracts what Said calls ‘a common human failing[:] to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human’.[[731]](#footnote-732) I prioritise ‘a sense of the density and interdependency of human life’, which, writes Said, ‘can neither be reduced to a formula nor be brushed aside as irrelevant’.[[732]](#footnote-733) Unlike Booth’s novel, which reduces social identities to easy-to-navigate, unidimensional stereotypes, my narrative investigation of identity leaves the protagonist and narrator perplexed. Recognising her inability to navigate the complex social matrix, Anna moves from experiencing fear (in Chapter 21) and then hope (in Chapter 23) that she might ‘disappear’.[[733]](#footnote-734) This desire to disappear symbolises my own desire as author to produce a “self-destructive novel”, one that challenges its own authority.[[734]](#footnote-735)

While, typically, the flâneur is ‘the centre around which city movements are organised’,[[735]](#footnote-736) I refuse both my protagonist and narrator this central orientation. While one method of de-centralising Anna would be to offset her perspective with the voice of a local, this approach risks positioning my authorial self as equipped to speak on behalf of a “disenfranchised” local population and thus discursively re-marginalising this population. To counter this arrogant claim, although Anna encounters characters like Kallum who challenge her perspective, she is conscious of her inability to fully empathise with his experiential reality, recognising that her questions often ‘mis[s] the point’, and that her ‘every word seems to confirm his accusation’, that she ‘[doesn’t] live it’ and will ‘never understan[d]’.[[736]](#footnote-737) Equally, while I make room in my narrative for coverage of disenfranchised political movements like the Umbrella Revolution, I frame these moments with Anna’s awareness of her inability to fully embody or comprehend these struggles, given her postcolonial positionality. I offset Anna’s centrality by using a second flâneur that is also herself (and a third-person narrator who alternately focalises these perspectives). These flâneurs have a dialogical relationship, meaning neither can claim the centre.

While, Tsung-yi Huang writes that ‘seeing the crowd as inferior to him, the flâneur can never completely identify himself as one of them [though] ... he is never a total outsider’,[[737]](#footnote-738) my third person narrator always positions at least one instance of Anna within the crowd. Even when Anna is physically isolated from other people, the narrator remains keenly aware of Anna’s social positionality and the relationship between each temporal instance of the character. In this way, Anna can never assume the superiority of Baudelaire’s unobserved observer. As it is Anna’s focalised thoughts that comprised the narration, this produces the effect of Anna being the object of her own study, transforming her from critic to critiqued. Such a transformation takes place in the following extract:

The bus comes too fast and too close to the pavement, they always do, but she is yet to find that out. Anna flinches at the rush and the stink of hot rubber and remembers the sharp jab that makes the panic so much worse.

A jab on her shoulder and Anna swings around; a whole queue of waiting passengers are glaring at her. She shuffles towards the back along the curb into a space that can’t fit her, muttering apologies. She is new, she doesn’t know.

A man with no expression offers her his seat. She hovers for too long, unsure whether to it is polite to take it, and the man’s expression hardens… She is *new*, she doesn’t *know*.[[738]](#footnote-739)

The repeated thought, ‘she is new, she doesn’t know’, imitates the frustrated, panicked reflection of the past character, as the narrative lens watches her struggle. At the same time, though the present Anna (and narrator) are “now” aware that the buses come too close to the pavement and that she needs to queue, she is unable to correct her past mistakes, re-experiencing ‘the rush and the stink’ in the present. In contrast to the hero of classic colonial adventure writing, whose ‘progress, though at times dubious, is never finally in serious doubt’,[[739]](#footnote-740) my protagonist is susceptible to diversions and always exposed to figmentations that threaten her progress. Where Booth’s retrospective framework, for example, means his character is always conspicuously free from harm, when Anna ‘remembers the prod on her shoulder’, she then seems to “feel” it again in the present. She is symbolically still in the crowd and cannot escape the humiliation of her cultural ignorance, thus disturbing her authority of hindsight.

The third person narrator is similarly unable to assume authority as both past and present experiences are held in suspension, neither of which can be trusted. Timothy Mo uses a similar “decentralisation” of the idea of narrative authority in *An Insular* *Possession* through which he aims to critique the claimed objectivity of historical voices; as Ho writes, ‘[the novel] is not written in the form of a master narrative but as a jumble of narratives, all jostling each other for supremacy’.[[740]](#footnote-741) As both of my flâneur perspectives jostle for supremacy in the present, neither can ever fully occupy the “centre”. The ‘dual-flâneur’ is not a stabiliser for her primary experience but reflects a splitting of the central authority; she isn’t doubled but divided.

**Blindfolding the Author**

Zerweck writes that ‘by juxtaposing two unreliable narrators [a writer may] seriously questio[n] (hyper)realist claims that “objective and authoritative versions of events can in principle be established”’.[[741]](#footnote-742) However, if I am to disrupt the authority of the post-colonial English language novel itself, I need to similarly decentralise myself as author. The concept of ‘narrative unreliability’ provides a useful framework through which to highlight where my novel differs in this respect from Booth and Cole’s. Wayne C. Booth’s classic definition depends upon the author’s establishment of ‘norms’, in terms of textual events and a “reality” from which the ‘unreliable narrator’ deviates. Later critics expanded this understanding to include ‘“[…] an interpretive strategy or cognitive process of the sort that has come to be known as ‘naturalisation’”.[[742]](#footnote-743) As Martin Booth and Cole construct unreliable narrators who, due to personal character flaws, have ‘problems ... retrospectively (re)constructing ... events’ as they are plotted by the omniscient author, both authors present themselves as “above” the flaws, ignorance and behavioural ironies they point out in their characters. In my methodology, I refuse to occupy this position of knowledge; where my narrator embodies the typical ‘explicit or implicit disclosure of his or her own unreliability’, as author, I limit ‘textual elements’ that allow the reader to navigate or ‘resolve with recourse’ these ‘referential difficulties [and] incongruities’.[[743]](#footnote-744)

In Booth and Cole’s cases, the novel form remains a ‘privileged intellectual tool’[[744]](#footnote-745) through which the author exercises his authority. This process is illustrated by Huang in his study of Wong Kar-wai’s film *Chungking Express*, which he identifies as Wong’s ‘“[a]uthentic [m]apping of Hong Kong”’;[[745]](#footnote-746) Huang suggests that Wong is a ‘director-flâneur’, whose attempt to ‘map out the city with a private eye’ is a move towards rescuing ‘an authentic image of Hong Kong before it is lost forever’ to globalisation. While Huang points to an occasional ‘blind spot in the seemingly encompassing and omniscient mapping’, Wong’s eye remains central, guiding the camera’s movement through space.[[746]](#footnote-747) Cole and Booth similarly guide their reader’s interaction with their central characters. Hartwiger points out that Cole ‘creates an important distance between author and protagonist’, allowing him to reinforce Julius’s own limitations and blind spots, complicating the readers’ trust in Julius’s narrative perspective.[[747]](#footnote-748) Similarly, in *Gweilo*, mapping the blind-spots of the child, the author presents himself as a figurative “moral compass”, fixing himself at the centre. For example, when recalling his mother’s lesson, ‘a hundred and something years ago, we stole this land from the Chinese [and b]ecause of that, we owe an obligation to the people who live here’,[[748]](#footnote-749) Booth simultaneously “educates” his reader. In so doing he claims the authority of educator, positioning himself as “above” this former ignorance. Though their narrators might lack self-awareness, Cole and Booth, as authors, exert their intellectual privilege to expose it. By guiding the “camera”, Booth and Cole, like Wong, keep themselves out of the frame. As Phillips argues, ‘as the author vanishes in the map, the map exudes authority’.[[749]](#footnote-750)

Unlike Booth, I refuse my narrator the privilege of retrospect to “correct” or “validate” Anna’s past or present assumptions. This technique is exemplified when my narrator recounts Anna’s memory of her mother’s attempt to give money to a begging monk:

‘Real monks don't beg’, [Anna] intervenes.

How did she know that? Her mother asks. Anna pauses. Someone had told her.

But in the space that followed she too began to question … [S]he had believed it straight away … [E]ven though it was probably true, she was ashamed to have dispensed it without first checking her facts. But she insists, her mother doubts, and she insists again. She cannot lose on this detail; it is such an insight. Anna realises now that she still has not checked and probably never will. She can only hope it is true because in the end she gave him nothing and, on her advice, neither had her mother.[[750]](#footnote-751)

Here, while acknowledging Anna’s past-ignorance, the narrator points out she ‘still has not checked’. My novel resists signposting Anna’s actions as just or otherwise; Anna’s blind-spot is shared by the narrator. As Boehmer writes, ‘gaps, uncertainties, and discontinuities – or what Franco Moretti following Ernest Bloch has termed ‘nonsynchronism’ – cannot be immediately resolved into ... a uni-linear course of action’.[[751]](#footnote-752) In so doing, I keep myself, as author, visible, not as a critical authority, but as a flawed subject who is complicit in the ignorance my text exposes.

Zerweck argues that ‘the representation of narrators’ illusions and difficulties of “making sense” of their fictional worlds is not unreliable at all, but a reliable presentation of the highly problematic human position with regard to cognitive, epistemological, and even ontological certainties’.[[752]](#footnote-753) I refuse even this ‘reliable presentation’ of unreliability. As writer I make no claims to fully comprehend the extent of Anna’s unreliability, producing what Boehmer calls an ‘unsorted-ness’, that simultaneously engages the reader in an ethical evaluation. I deliberately use narrative disorientation to:

demand the reader[‘s] creative input and involvement, intensifying the continual, often dilatory, and wayward transactions that take place between the reader and text [while] also intensif[ying] and enhanc[ing] the exchanges and translations across ... cultural borderlines.[[753]](#footnote-754)

This method demands that both Anna and the reader direct themselves through this scene and thus more consciously navigate the postcolonial space. In so doing, the hope is that ‘meanings which cannot yet be articulated in so many words might be … subversively inferred’,[[754]](#footnote-755) and to expose where fixed meanings cannot and should not be sought.

I embody my own inability to “make sense” of Hong Kong in Anna and my narrator’s struggle with language. Booth’s treatment of language reinforces discursive inequalities. His narrator boasts about his ‘substantial’ ability to speak Cantonese, he communicates with locals predominantly in broken English; this highlights his inability to acknowledge that local man’s bilingualism exceeds his own. In contrast to Booth’s narrator’s overt claims about his ‘command of their language’,[[755]](#footnote-756) which he uses specifically to gain access to social space, Anna is conscious of inability to speak or understand Cantonese. Moments of arrogance, for example, when she mocks her mother’s misinterpretation of a vendor’s insult, ‘‘gwai poh!’ for a friendly ‘goodbye’,[[756]](#footnote-757) are quashed by constant reminders of her own inadequacy. Anna fails to parrot even simple words correctly, such as the taxi driver’s ‘M̀hgòi’, trying ‘Mm-goi,’ first and then ‘Mmm goiy’, later, before he eventually stops listening.[[757]](#footnote-758) The third person narrator keeps these conflicting ideas in suspension, capturing Anna’s struggle to place herself in relation to Cantonese. In *Gweilo*, any attempt by the narrator to mediate this lingual arrogance is undercut by his failure to contend with the morality of his positionality; though Booth feigns modesty, admitting that his own ‘pronunciation and ... grammatical accuracy ... were doubtless atrocious’, he boasts that his ability is ‘more than sufficient’,[[758]](#footnote-759) refusing to acknowledge the privilege that enables him to be flippant. To counter this erasure, my narrative foregrounds Anna’s lingual inadequacies. This multi-layered approach to the ‘produc[tion of] counter-currents to discursive authority’[[759]](#footnote-760) is exemplified in my decision to describe the ‘sounds’ and impressions of the Cantonese she overhears rather than transcribe or translate it retrospectively, using translation tools to produce a transcript that would undoubtedly be inaccurate. Boehmer points to a tendency of postcolonial writers to ‘fraudulently occup[y] the central ground’, as they attempt to unsettle it ‘formally through ‘impure’ and polyvocal effects to stimulate resistance or to ‘write back’ to colonial authority’.[[760]](#footnote-761) By adversely refusing to be ‘polyvocal’, my narrator communicates Anna’s experience of not understanding while I refuse to position my novel as a map of meanings. Ultimately, Anna’s uncentredness models my narrative methodology, the idea that no single narrative claiming to represent Hong Kong should be taken as authoritative, particularly for the city defined by contradiction and globalist multiplicity.[[761]](#footnote-762)

My narrative epiphany encapsulates the protagonist’s, narrator’s and ultimately my own authorial decentralisation. This is metonymically captured when, as she finally leaves, she notices her ‘plane revolves around [Hong Kong]’,[[762]](#footnote-763) positioning Hong Kong firmly at the centre. By the end of the novel, she is literally estranged from the space she tries to narrate; Anna ‘turns, for one last glimpse … but sound barriers block the view, and they are moving too fast.[[763]](#footnote-764) Unlike Booth’s self-interested reflection: ‘I thought that, no matter what, I could always claim to have lived there’,[[764]](#footnote-765) my novel leaves the narrative lens firmly fixed on Hong Kong as she concludes, ‘tomorrow their contrails will dissipate, but far below them, those lights will continue to pulse’.[[765]](#footnote-766) As Booth’s narrator and his mother leave, Hong Kong is described with a melancholy tone and air of finality; his mother is ‘crying’, while Hong Kong is ‘silhouetted’ across the ‘shimmering water’. It is only once he explains in the final line that ‘four years later ... we were back. For good’, that Hong Kong is finally granted a permanence in the narrative.[[766]](#footnote-767) It is this idea that Hong Kong exists ‘only in order to occupy his eye, to provoke his reflections, to stimulate his existence’ that my novel turns away from. Where Booth’s ‘city appears as a spectacle produced for the *flâneur* to enjoy and consume’,[[767]](#footnote-768) my narrative reflects Anna’s recognition that Hong Kong will continue to exist whether or not she is there experiencing it.[[768]](#footnote-769)

By producing a novel set in Hong Kong, I am undoubtedly contributing my own perspective and experience to the field of English Language Hong Kong discourse. However, my contribution interrogates rather than asserts my authority to do so. As Jørgensen and Phillips argue, while ‘one cannot completely escape one’s own understandings’, writing ‘can at least, make it possible to ask new questions of our own understandings’.[[769]](#footnote-770) My ‘dual-flâneur’ structure dramatises this questioning; as the third-person narrator observes Anna closely, Anna is framed as object to be critiqued, a product and producer of socio-economic structures and ideas of identity. The novel is aimed primarily at a non-native Hong Kong readership but invites local readers to share and participate in the critique and self-critique of discursive constructions of post-colonial Hong Kong. My narrative deliberately ‘provoke[s] unrest in one’s conscience about cultural, racial, [and] historical generalisations, their uses, value, degree of objectivity’.[[770]](#footnote-771) Exemplary of Boehmer’s argument that postcolonial writing ‘carries particular imaginative as well as ethical force’, my methodology flits ‘between worlds’, carried by the novel, which highlights as it occupies the space ‘between a community and the ... writer who speaks for them’, steered by the narrator who ‘go[es] between a writer in one context and a reader in another’.[[771]](#footnote-772) Encouraged to reflect on their own positionality, my novel refuses to allow the narrator, author or reader to sit comfortably. By exposing ‘the arrangements and technologies of social systems [and] literary dynamics’ this ‘dual-flâneur’ structure can thus be used to navigate intersections within other decolonial or radical literary narratives.[[772]](#footnote-773)

**Conclusion**

**A Place for Transnational Voices**

As Chapter 1 concluded, the ‘territorial’ and defensive narrative tropes of classic “nation-building” succeed only in conveying Hong Kong as a politically and ideologically compromised space: the “nation-like space”, defined by anxiety and on ‘unreal’ conceptions of space that are no longer feasible in this age of globalism. At the same time, equally formulaic and cliché models of representation, such as hybridity and “inbetween-ness”, produce a similarly compromised identity for Hong Kong, producing, as Szeman puts it, ‘an *identity* of *nonidentity*’.[[773]](#footnote-774) Some “local” writers like Louise Ho, Xu Xi, and Leung Ping-kwan choose to celebrate this non-identity and marginality with a ‘proudly independent voice’. These writers are playful with the very idea of “locality”; as Minford reflects: born in mainland China and proud representative voice of Hong Kong’, Leung Ping-kwan elects to ‘‘have some fun’’ with deliberately loaded permutations of his name: ‘Yah See’, which ‘can be read either in their original Cantonese, or in Mandarin, the lingua franca of the new Empire’;[[774]](#footnote-775) and “PK”, ‘relish[ing] in the irony, the fake nostalgia, of [the] colonial naming device’.[[775]](#footnote-776) However, despite this self-aware playfulness, the image of “Hong Kong identity” produced in such writing similarly embodies Szeman’s ‘zone of instability’.[[776]](#footnote-777) In this narrative climate, Hong Kong is bound to an identity of liminality, foregrounding the idea of its position as ‘a place on the margins, a border town, and island as opposed to a, or the, continent (or mainland)’.[[777]](#footnote-778) This narrative formula represents Hong Kong subjectivity, while distinctive, as dependant on perpetual production and re-production; it ‘*needs* other listening’ and threatens to ‘disappear’ towards 2047 and beyond.

Other aspects of “nation-building”, however, such as the narrative representation of ‘simultaneity’ and a “productive”, collective imagination, are used by Xi Xi, in *My City*, and by Leung, in *Islands and Continents*, to represent Hong Kong as an anchor for identity construction. As discussed in Chapter 2, their focus on societal networks, subjective experiences, and interpersonal, temporal connections, situates their characters, showcasing feelings of attachment and permanence. I have recreated this idea in my own writing. Drawing on their method of ‘cognitive mapping’, I position my protagonist within this connected network, exploring the implications of her positionality as an explorer of space and as focal point for the narration. In his discussion of the contemporary Hong Kong psychogeographical film-making of Wong Kar-wai, Huang describes Wong’s attempts to map a more ‘“real” Hong Kong’ by flitting between spaces of ‘local memories, personal and collective’ to suggest a logic exists that counters that imposed by globalisation’.[[778]](#footnote-779) Anna similarly navigates the topographical and socio-political space of globalised Hong Kong according to the impulses triggered by memory and affect. Unlike Wong’s flâneur, however, these impulses almost never pay-off in the way Anna hopes or expects, and by the end of the novel she ends up further away from reconnecting with Kallum and other Hong Kong acquaintances than when she began.

By relocating this affective/memory mapping from the surrealist and magic realist worlds of Xi Xi and Leung, into a ‘real world’ framework, I foreground the ‘instability of a system of signs that can never be wholly secure due to the ambiguous interdependency between the imaginary and the real’.[[779]](#footnote-780) While, as Huang writes of Wong’s film, ‘the flâneur [witnesses] the fragmentary nature of city life [, t]he dream world of urban spectacle[, which] offers ... no complete narrative’ and therefore ‘has to make sense of the fragments by himself’, my narrator is unable to piece together the fragments of Anna’s memory into a logical pathway.[[780]](#footnote-781) Destabilising the notion of “logic of the place”’ altogether[[781]](#footnote-782), the framework of cognitive mapping within a ‘real world’ is thus fundamental to my disruption of narrative authority. I use “cognitive mapping” not as a way of mapping space but in order to guide the reader around ring-roads, through dicey intersections, and, quite literally, to dead ends.

**Refusing the Silent Retreat**

However, my novel’s “dead-end” and “self-destructive” narrative perspective and irresolution does not seek to “silence” my own or other non-native voices that attempt to narrate experiences of contemporary Hong Kong. My methodology does not discredit the transnational experience or aspects of Hong Kong’s identity but sets out alternative ways to represent Hong Kong’s transnationalism; I steer away from simply describing a transnational space, depicting characters with “international” affiliations, and contributing to the ‘non-identity’ that overtly “transnational” texts like Xu Xi’s *The Unwalled City* produce. Instead, I utilise my own transnationality- my insider/outsider positionality- as a means of exposing and subverting the power structures that underpin English language Hong Kong writing by British expatriates. In the introduction to his crucial anthology, ‘City Voices: Hong Kong Writing in English, 1945 to the Present’, Ingham writes,

In a community that is approximately 98% Cantonese speaking and one that is, in theory at least, post-colonial in consciousness, it is clear that for the population at large and for the burgeoning Chinese-language literary scene, local English writing must be seen at best as an irrelevance, at worst an irritating excrescence generated by the colonial era.[[782]](#footnote-783)

While it may be argued that the clearest way for me to avoid “marginalising” or “misrepresenting” Hong Kong is to refrain from offering my perspective altogether. My critical analysis of Booth’s *Gweilo*, however, leads me to conclude the opposite: to gloss-over the structural and discursive inequalities that underpinned my experience of navigating and writing Hong Kong would be irresponsible.

My novel’s crisis, where Anna retreats from the disorienting city to her rooftop, is a metonymical exploration of the extent to which I, as author, might chose to engage with the city in narrative. After an inconclusive and fragmented phone conversation with Claudi, having failed to restore their friendship or offer a meaningful apology, Anna retreats to the rooftop.[[783]](#footnote-784) There, she literally hides behind barriers that ‘shiel[d]’ her from the rest of Hong Kong: the ‘perimeter wall’; the tinted windows make the mountains appear ‘glossy’; the ‘borde[r]’ of village houses and overgrown foliage; and the ‘panorama’ of mountains that ‘encircle her’. She closes her eyes as a final defence.[[784]](#footnote-785) Literally “removing herself” from the space of anxiety, attempting to untangle herself from the complex network of meanings and social relations, this retreat figuratively explores my option as a writer to disengage with the discursive challenges of post-colonial Hong Kong. Reflecting, ‘the silence is thorough and reassuring’, Anna is comforted by her inability to engage with, affect, or reflect upon Hong Kong.[[785]](#footnote-786) However, this retreat is then destabilised as Anna begins to reflect upon her symbolic post-colonial responsibility.

Hook describes ‘a type of self-exemption, a self-aggrandizing form of detachment, as in the case of a member of a group who fails to enter dialogue, who steps outside the bonds of reciprocation’.[[786]](#footnote-787) While Hook’s discussion maps American race relations, his theory is relevant when considering my own decision to engage in dialogue about my discursive positionality. While Anna’s retreat may represent a refusal to exercise the privilege to ‘map’ Hong Kong, Hook argues that ‘in as much as such a ‘not speaking’ constitutes a gesture, it remains a kind of positivity, indeed, an action’ which may in fact be ‘a very effective form of aggression’.[[787]](#footnote-788) Anna begins to realise that her retreat has in fact brought her to ‘a place where her voice could be the loudest’.[[788]](#footnote-789) As Hook concludes, this disengagement magnifies dialogical hostility, and is only feasible from an existing position of privilege. Symbolically disrupting this defensive discursive retreat, I flood the narrative with a re-invasion of reality. I counteract Anna’s initial detachment, as ‘her thoughts begin to drift’,[[789]](#footnote-790) with a reflux of sensory experience: the vibrations from the road which ‘grow louder’ and the ‘piercing white [that] sear[s] her retinas’.[[790]](#footnote-791) These sounds are attributed to the ‘churn of tyres’ on the road’,[[791]](#footnote-792) and thus represent the chaos of Anna’s psychological relationship with space. This violent language builds to Anna’s stark realisation that she must reengage with Hong Kong. This realisation is dramatized in her memory of a time when her decision to rescue a bird’s body from snakes on the ground instead allowed a bird of prey to ‘clai[m] it from the sky’.[[792]](#footnote-793) In this reflection, Anna acknowledges uncertainty, accepting that she will never know if the bird was better or worse off on the ground. This reflection is placed at this crisis point as a metaphor for Anna’s own positionality, and her realisation that while the roof might be ‘safer’, she cannot escape the “reality” of uncertainty, change, and complexity. This scene thus resolves when Anna accepts that her relationship to Hong Kong is unsolvable, and therefore concludes that; ‘out there is perilous and vast, but she needs to re-join it’, subsequently returning to the village and the station.[[793]](#footnote-794)

Ironically, in this moment, Anna truly embodies the figure of the flâneur who does not affect the world she observes despite being a part of it. It is a figure which, as Bijan Stephan argues, ‘has fallen out of favour’ in contemporary narrative due to the ‘modern horror at the thought of doing absolutely nothing’.[[794]](#footnote-795) Ultimately, by re-entering the city space, Anna’s gesture represents an acceptance of her inability to be the central governing authority of the space. My production of a text is an assertion of engagement, a refusal to be silent, in an effort to actively challenge my own voice as it speaks. In so doing, I facilitate dialogue about the contribution of Hong Kong English language discourse to post-colonial and globalist structural inequalities. My novel embodies the notion that a single perspective can be both flawed and unrepresentative of any external “reality” and yet part of a post-colonial collective.

**“The Narrative State”**

My literary aesthetic draws on Szeman’s assertion that the task of the contemporary writer is ‘to open up a different way of conceptualising the nation: not as a preformed political structure ... but as a problematic that draws together the hope of forming new collectives’.[[795]](#footnote-796) My writing attempts to make space for conflicting political, personal and master narratives, rather than trying to defend or depict a single, ‘truthful’ representation of Hong Kong. I turn now to Kwame Anthony Appiah’s model of *Cosmopolitanism*, in which he proposes an ‘ethics’ for understanding conflicting perspectives and globalised identities. While my methodology is not a prescription for a wider identity-formation for the people of Hong Kong, his model for the acceptance of subjective difference is useful when considering how to represent my own experiences of Hong Kong through narrative. He argues,

People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because there are so many possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life.[[796]](#footnote-797)

While Kymlicka and Straehle dismiss ‘cosmopolitan democracy’ as ‘utopian’,[[797]](#footnote-798) which is perhaps the case when understood as a *political* model, my methodology demonstrates how this model of multiplicity and difference has profound value as the foundation for a new *narrative* model for English Hong Kong writing.

If my writing is to blur boundaries between “local”, “sojourner”, “outsider” and “insider”, it must move away from territorial and authoritative frameworks and instead towards a methodology that makes room for this multiplicity and disputability. It must incorporate, without attempting to “resolve”, Szeman’s ‘zone of instability’ into the narrative framework and texture without positioning instability as definitive of Hong Kong. Antonija Primorac identifies a similar indeterminate conception of space in her analysis of narrative and filmic representations of post-colonial Dublin; she discusses a ‘gradual recognition of the layered, complex meanings of ‘heritage’, combined with a changed understanding of the city as a living being that values its plural histories’.[[798]](#footnote-799)

While some texts, from Preston Schoyer’s *The Typhoon’s Eye* (1959) to Xu Xi’s *The Unwalled City* (2001) ‘explore the dissonances that leave [the] city so unanchored’,[[799]](#footnote-800) my narrative structure uses this dissonance *as* an anchor. This difference marks a pivot in the trajectory of English Language Hong Kong identity discourse, from a struggling and subjugated “nation-like space” to what I am calling a “narrative state”. The “narrative state” does not envision or try to represent a ‘real’ geography of boundaries and political demarcations. Whilst Wong Kar-wai undertakes an ‘“[a]uthentic [m]apping of Hong Kong”’, suggesting ‘it is Chungking Mansion and Midnight Express instead of the Bank of China or Peninsula Hotel that constitute the "reality" of Hong Kong's urban spectacle as shared and dreamed by the local community’, this description embodies conflict that surrounds any attempt to fix a ‘real’ Hong Kong.[[800]](#footnote-801) Even this ‘shared’, imaginative, “street level” ideation of Hong Kong, symbolised by the Chungking mansion image, is always exposed to master narratives that contradict it (narratives of world economic, trade and tourism networks, symbolised in his Bank of China and Peninsula hotel references).[[801]](#footnote-802) In my narrative, the protagonist reflects that when each narrative, from the personal to the historical, discursively recognises its own fallibility and incompleteness, no single voice can claim to represent a “true” Hong Kong or threaten to diminish another.

My “narrative state” thus finds space for multiple histories, multiple responses to these histories, multiple presents and futures. In this post-national, globalised era, of political, cultural and ideological contestation, my narrative speaks together with, not over, a multitude of other voices. Where “nation-building” formulae attempt to ‘inven[t] nations where they do not exist’, ‘to fill the emotional void left by the retreat or disorientation, or the unavailability of real communities and networks’[[802]](#footnote-803), my “narrative state” literary aesthetic, presents these communities and networks asstill in existence, in and through the plurality and connectedness of narrative voices that comprise Hong Kong. As opposed to a territory that multiple voices fight over, the “narrative state” imagines a narrative multiverse, positioning subjective difference as not only inevitable but necessary for the production of less-fraught, post-colonially responsible writing.

The phrase “narrative state” is therefore playful with the multiple meanings of “state”; diminishing the importance of ‘real’ geographical and political states; my narrative instead focalises multiple “states-of-mind”, both the protagonist’s own conflicting mindsets and other perspectives besides her own. Just like Suyin, Xi Xi and Leung’s characters are caught up in a feeling or ‘state’ of belonging, my novel models the idea that Hong Kong narratives may be least socio-politically antagonistic when they are written with either the covert or overt awareness of their imaginary components and yet the affective power of such imaginings. It is illuminating to return now to Henry James’s classic model of realist narrative, which, I conclude, is also a useful model for conceptualising Hong Kong. James argues that such writing

is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spiderweb of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness … It is the very atmosphere of the mind.[[803]](#footnote-804)

While the “narrative state” model suggests that a personal, subjective narrative cannot be contradicted by more dominant geo-political master narratives, perhaps more importantly, neither narrative should therefore impose the type of limitation on Hong Kong identity that fuels cross-border discriminations or re-assert discursive hierarchies. However, whilst James writes that within realist narrative lies the ‘power to judge the whole space by the pattern’, this argument is based on the premise that the writer feels life ‘so completely that [they are] well on [their] way to knowing any particular corner of it’.[[804]](#footnote-805) My “narrative state” emphatically rejects the claim of any one narrative to represent a whole, or even to fully know the corner they occupy. While the individual experiences or states-of-mind are skewed and responsive to master-narratives, since the model does not depend on the truthfulness of any one of these experiences, the whole remains undamaged. My own narrative, for example, relates my personal experience from inside Eurocentric frameworks and post-colonial contexts, but it does so all the while encouraging readers to see it as just one suspended fictional thread. Dung Kai-cheung theorises at the end of *Atlas: The Archaeology of an Imaginary City*, ‘only places that do not exist can escape being possessed’.[[805]](#footnote-806) My “narrative state” methodology inverts this idea and reimagines it as a literary aesthetic: the Hong Kong that exists as multiple narrative voices cannot be dispossessed.

**‘And what of the future?’**

* **Han Suyin, *A Many Splendoured Thing***

Boehmer writes that ‘postcolonial writing ... is interested in mapping or scoring a progressive structure, a chronology or a syntagmatic axis ... draw[ing] a reader into an act of communication ... taking them through and beyond’.[[806]](#footnote-807) The success of my new methodology and its embodiment in *The Widening of Tolo Highway* can be evaluated against this premise. How effectively I expose discursive power structures and the legacies of colonial print-capital will be determined by the novel’s reception by both Hong Kong “locals” and British expatriate readers, who I hope will recognise in my characters aspects of their own relationship to Hong Kong. In *Postcolonial Poetics*, Boehmer writes that

as we read we negotiate actively with the text’s various latent and emergent properties ... working out how we place ourselves in relation to those meanings ... so that as we process its meanings we are also repeatedly considering how the book or poem appeals to us, how it solicits our interest, how it may seek to tell something of ourselves.[[807]](#footnote-808)

The success of my novel will be determined by readers’ engagement with the novel as a catalyst (but not a map) of self-reflection. As Boehmer explains, the transformative power of the postcolonial ‘involves bringing together very different and even clashing frameworks or reference, yet in such a way that some kind of sympathy or cross-border connection may be forged’.[[808]](#footnote-809) As Hong Kong approaches 2047, and is fully repatriated, my methodology points English language Hong Kong writing away from a defensive and assertively independent ideation of Hong Kong identity, and instead towards more ‘productive’ transnational discursive interactions. My hope is that my novel will occupy a small corner of this body of English language Hong Kong writing that celebrates the fictionality of both nations and narratives.

**Part 2) The Widening of Tolo Highway** (Under indefinite embargo due to publication)

**Appendices**

**Appendix 1: Interview Methodology**

In September 2017 I conducted seventeen semi-structured interviews with people living and/or working in Hong Kong (or who had recently left), including locals, temporary migrant and expatriates. One purpose of these interviews was to gather primary data to indicate general attitudes of the Hong Kong population regarding the existence and formation of “Hong Kong identity”. I analysed this discourse alongside literature and news media to determine the extent the which trends in the literature and in the collective consciousness correlated. A second purpose was to provide material to draw from in my creative work for context, characterisation, dialogue and linguistic characteristics.

My research interviews complement and expand both Pauline Leonard’s 2008, and John Trent’s 2012, studies of the post-1997 subject construction of Western expatriates working in Hong Kong. Both Leonard and Trent interviewed only expatriates, Trent stating that ‘further research should explore the beliefs, attitudes, and values of other key stakeholders such as policy makers, local teachers, and students [to] enhance understanding of how collaboration between Native English Teachers (NETs) and these different stakeholders can be promoted in Hong Kong’.[[809]](#footnote-810)

I selected interviewees from a range of backgrounds including Hong Kong, Britain, Australia, Indonesia, who live (or have recently) lived in Hong Kong. The interviewees share an experience either of an ‘International’ school, or of Native English Teachers (NETs); many have worked in, been educated in, or have children who have been educated in these contexts. I pre-selected subjects with whom I have had both a personal and professional relationship in the past (pseudonyms have been used) to encourage a more relaxed and comprehensive discussion, but am careful to encourage participants to discuss experiences outside of our relationship, if this is more comfortable. I included interviews with overseas migrants to supplement local perspectives.[[810]](#footnote-811)

The semi-structured nature of these interviews allows the interviewee to steer the discussion and represent Hong Kong in their own way, as far as possible.[[811]](#footnote-812)

The focus on place responds, in part, to Abbas’s argument that ‘ideas of movement, transition and liminality are found not only in personal biographies but also in the representations of Hong Kong as a place’.[[812]](#footnote-813) I thus aimed to trace these key themes that were dominant in my review of English language Hong Kong literature, in interviewees’ descriptions of Hong Kong. I begin by asking for descriptions of Hong Kong’s geography, topography and social environment. Later, in order to magnify Leonard’s ‘exploration of the ways in which subjectivities ... may shift and change over space and time’,[[813]](#footnote-814) I introduce a temporal dimension to these ideations asking specifically about Hong Kong’s past and future.

Discussing the importance of place in post-colonial Hong Kong subject construction, Leonard states that ‘just as the architectural landscape is a vibrant mix of old and new symbols, with the dwarfing of the British Imperial style by global high-rises, so too is the terrain on which identities are constructed and performed’.[[814]](#footnote-815) I refrain from offering any of these potential ‘symbols’, by leaving ‘overt mentioning of identity categories’ like ‘mainland Chinese’, ‘British’ or ‘Western’, to the interviewee. Equally, I avoid using relational terms such as ‘change’ and ‘difference’, to allow comparisons to arise authentically. By so doing I am able to identify what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe call ‘nodal points[;] privileged sign[s] around which other signs are ordered’ to explore networks of building blocks used by interviewees to construct identity.[[815]](#footnote-816)

I then prompt interviewees to describe their ‘relationship to Hong Kong’ and what they deem to be ‘most important’ in their everyday lives, before probing more specifically into Hong Kong’s political and cultural landscape. This juxtaposition of personal priorities and the surrounding environment is to interrogate Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall’s multiple levels of ‘relationality’, which they use to describe how place can influence individual identity. The first: “relations of authorization” ... can include the imposing or affirming of an identity through institutionalized power and ideology and is one strategy for legitimizing beliefs’.[[816]](#footnote-817) I then move into discussions of Native English Teachers. Introducing this distinct social category, I prompt the ‘relational’ function of space, whereby ‘identities become socially meaningful in relation to other available identity positions and to other actors’.[[817]](#footnote-818) As Fairclough argues, ‘one type of identity relation is differentiation, which establishes relations of social difference through the creation of a “logic of difference”’.[[818]](#footnote-819) I choose to overtly interrogate key nodal points, such as ‘West’, even if this term wasn’t specifically used by the interviewee to test for ‘taken-for-granted, naturalised ascriptions of meaning’, but kept his for later in the interview to avoid influencing the initial direction of the discussion.[[819]](#footnote-820) I anticipated that interviewees would discuss this ‘Western’ identity as located in people from the geographical West (i.e. Britain, America, Canada), and solidify a “Hong Kong identity” in relation to this term.

While identities are tied to these national, or “nation-like” spaces, I also focalise smaller spaces, like the International School environment. Just like Han Suyin, who ‘keeps up with business in Hong Kong ... by watching the lobby of one hotel’, reimagining the hotel lobby as a ‘barometer of trade and financial weather’, I explore social relations and relational identity construction in a concentrated space. On one level, this responds to Leonard’s statement that ‘[o]rganizations and work provide a particularly interesting site ... because the ‘doing the work’ has always been critical to expatriate/ Hong Kong life, not least for the construction of ... identities’, while also revealing ‘tensions and changes ... due to the continuous play of history, culture and power’.[[820]](#footnote-821) Moreover, the ‘International’ School environment is an enlightening as a space in which explicit identity categories like “International”, “Local”, “Native”, and even racial terms like “White”, are commonplace.

Trent identifies the international school as spaces in which identity is constructed on multiple levels. To explore ‘the level of the social institution’, in terms of ‘policies and practices’;[[821]](#footnote-822) I ask interviewees to describe Hong Kong’s attitude towards English education. The ‘interpersonal level’, describing participants’ ‘relations’ with each other,[[822]](#footnote-823) is illuminated as interviewees are asked about their own, or their child’s, experiences with Western tutors. And finally, an ‘intrapersonal level’ of subject construction, based on ‘beliefs’,[[823]](#footnote-824) is explored through a discussion of interviewees motivations for engaging with, and responses to, the international school environment. Discussions of this intrapersonal dimension is encouraged throughout the interview in language choices, for example, as I ask subjects to describe how they ‘feel about Hong Kong’s future’ and how they ‘think of Hong Kong’s past’. The verbs ‘feel’ and ‘think’ encourage subjects to relate personally to the images of Hong Kong they construct and provide a subjective rather than “factual” account of Hong Kong’s past and future. For this reason, I end the interview asking generally if there is anything else participants think might be relevant for a discussion of the Hong Kong identity.

Like previous studies by Leonard and Trent, my interviews interrogate parallels between Hong Kong’s mutating geopolitical environment and the shifting identities in Hong Kong. My interviews, however, expand on this research by encompassing more diverse perspectives and encouraging discussions of the relationship between identity categories. Leonard concludes that ‘subjective disorientations ... and the discursive themes of dislocation, mobility, [and] Western influence ... and return’ overshadowing themes of ‘local identity, belonging’.[[824]](#footnote-825) My focus on comparative and relational identity construction is intended to interrogate this conclusion in response to the varying narrative models of ‘belonging’ and “local-ness” I identified across the literature: Suyin’s, *A Many Splendoured Thing*, Xi Xi’s *My City: A Hong Kong Story*, Xu Xi’s *The Unwalled City*, and Booth’s *Gweilo: Memories of a Hong Kong Childhood*. The purpose of my study is not to try to paint an “accurate” picture of the Hong Kong identity from the testimonies of residents; as Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin argues, a ‘return to ‘authentic’ or ‘precolonial sources’ of identity construction is impossible’.[[825]](#footnote-826) Instead, my goal was to identify linguistic tropes through which Hong Kong subjects articulate identity in and of the Hong Kong space.

**Appendix 2**

**Interview Transcripts 2017**

**Annie Transcript**

Bio: Annie, who has grown up in Hong Kong, was my co-teacher in an International Kindergarten. She has a degree in Early-Education. She now runs her own business in Hong Kong selling imported Disney products from Japan.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like?**

I think it’s a good place. So many people like to come to Hong Kong. Hong Kong can buy many, many things come from other countries. You no need to go to other country; everything’s in Hong Kong.

I think it’s too small. In Hong Kong the people need to earn so many money to buy the things. In Hong Kong people thinks that you need to earn money.

**Can you describe Hong Kong culture?**

Let me translate in English… I think you can say that Hong Kong need to study. Parents think they need to learn more. You see they have some crying in the kindergarten now. And then it’s English drama; in the kindergarten now we have English drama. So yes, they think that you need to learn more and then you can go to a good primary school.

**What is the political atmosphere like in Hong Kong?**

Not very good. They all is come from China. So, do you remember is it the Yellow Umbrella? Only under control by the government, still.

**But now those protests are over, do people still feel that way?**

They’re still in Mong Kok every night. Only have twenty people here. They only want to let the people know that they still have a yellow umbrella, this one. Every night you come from Mong Kok you can still see some yellow umbrella here.

I think it’s different people now- older people.

**And why is that, why are people so angry?**

No, they just talking loudly and tell the people that we can’t follow the government. You can do what you want- like that.

**What’s your relationship to Hong Kong?**

I born here but I love Macau more. Because my mum come from Macau, so I think Macau is better than Hong Kong. Because the place is much better. Hong Kong is so crowd.

**So, your mum is from Macau, why did she move to Hong Kong?**

Because my dad is from Hong Kong. My mum is in sales. My dad is also working in some company.

**What are your main values, what is most important to you?**

Happy.

**And what is happy? Is it money, is it friends, is it stuff?**

I think happy is more important. I don’t like so many things to- how to say?- I only think that I don’t want so many questions- do you understand what I say? And also money is important. In Hong Kong if no money you cannot do everything.

**How do you feel about Hong Kong’s future? What does Hong Kong’s future look like?**

Not very good. So many people want to go another country to live because they think that the government is bad, that they will follow the China more. They cannot do everything you want in Hong Kong. You need to earn so many money. You cannot buy a house because the house so expensive and if you have fifty thousand [five thousand pounds] money you can go to Taipei, have a house and also have a café here.

**And how do you think of Hong Kong’s past?**

Before 1997 is still under England is better. More happy. When I was young, [my parents] can earn more money- also under the money questions- they can earn more money. So when I was young my mummy and daddy buyed many things for me. So, before 1997 is better because now Hong Kong many people under the money questions.

**Part 2**

**What’s Hong Kong’s attitude towards learning English?**

It’s very important this is. You can say that English is the main language, also the Putonghua. Putonghua and English is more important than Chinese now. Every students need to learn English and Putonghua. The Chinese- they think that you can learn from your parents.

**And why is English so important in Hong Kong?**

Because is it global language? Yeah, they think it’s global language, they need to talk with another people.

**Can you describe your own experiences of Western teachers?**

The Native English Teachers? You are very good. Before you, my English teacher is so bad because she don’t know how to teach children. But she still is my partner. I help her to do everythings. And also my class have so many accidents every day. And do you know [one of our students] is very naughty, and then the teachers will have- teachers will want to hold him and then this one [gestures a bruise] and take him to hospital. Yeah, because the teacher cannot control by herself. Also, she is very angry, yeah, little bit angry. She just want to hold him to stop him to crying.

And also some teachers think that [because] she love the students, can teach them. Yeah, they loves the babies- thinks that they can be an English kindergarten teachers, but they don’t know they need to control so many, many students. They think that they are annoying now, so some teachers will quit their job. Some teachers cannot teach students, I know that, but they think that English teachers have a great price or salaries so they think that they’ll be teachers. Because in the sales, you need to stay here for about twelve hours, and they only have ten thousand dollars [one thousand pounds] per month but, if teachers, many. I think they give the native teachers around twenty thousand? Around twenty thousands dollars. And Chinese teachers only have fifteen thousand.

**So what impact do you think western teachers have on the kids?**

The pronunciation. Is better than Hong Kong teachers. Because when I was young mummy also let me to learn from the… is it English cultural centre? Is it called? You know what’s that? In Admiralty. It’s called- ah, British Council! Yeah, in Hong Kong so many students learn English from this council. [I went for] around five years when I was young. So expensive but so many parents let the childrens to come here because all is the native teachers to teach them. Oh- now they have a kindergarten also! In Hong Kong they love the Native Teachers so much.

**When we use the phrase ‘the West’ or if we say somebody is Western, what does Western mean?**

Because before 1997 we are under English, so, so many people still following the things so they thinks that’s so Western.

**So is ‘West’ about a place or the way people behave?**

Not the way people behave. I don’t know but I think people say that. Yeah, so many people say that- but I don’t know this question! I didn’t think this question before.

**Anything else that you think would be relevant for a discussion about what the Hong Kong identity is?**

I don’t know, but I only know that Hong Kong can have so many things come here. Like me, I buy some Japan things from Japan to sell it out to my customers. But so many shops. And you can buy it- not from my shop- do you know Citysuper? I think maybe westerners say that Hong Kong Citysuper you can buy everything come from other countries because in that shop you can buy Japan things, you can buy everything come from other countries. Maybe so many people say that Hong Kong is very Western- maybe like that.

Is it also the bus like the London bus? Yeah, none in China. Also the MTR. Is it in England also have the ‘MTR’ company?

**No, we have the underground.**

Yeah maybe like that.

I hope I can help you about the teachers. Have so many bad teachers.

Some of these teachers no need to have a PhD or something. Yeah, you only have a native teacher who is teaching in Hong Kong because they only let you have the visa. Yeah because we have the PhD or teaching… so when they come we can teach it. So you have the helpers like that.

**End of interview**

**Bella Transcript**

Bio: Bella was born in Hong Kong. I used to tutor her two daughters, now aged five and seven, who attend an international school. She has recently moved from the New Territories to Kowloon.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like?**

Hong Kong is a good place that I live here because I love the people. And also, I see Hong Kong is very energetic because everyone working, especially in Hong Kong, is looking for power and good progress, a good future.

**If you were going to draw a picture of Hong Kong, what would you draw?**

I will draw mountains and the house, a garden in front of my house, and some peaceful environment. This I love… actually, this will not happen in Hong Kong [Island]- because [there] you will see a lot of buildings. But I love living in New Territories because before I living in Kowloon side- more tall buildings, a lot of people smoking and walking around, a lot of noisy cars and actually, yes, very convenient, but for me I love living in country- New Territories.

**What is Hong Kong culture?**

Hong Kong people, from my understanding, all are good. I like their relationship- the bond of relationship- especially the family. We all have a gathering together.

**And what’s Hong Kong’s political atmosphere like?**

Not good. I see a lot of people arguing, fighting about the policy. Very political. I think, for me, this is negative. I don’t like. Just like Taiwan. They[‘re] like Taiwan- fighting and arguing about the council. I see they have a lot of political reason to fight, from my understanding. No opinion from themselves -seem to be controlled- I mean. It’s not from Hong Kong people, it’s from other people, something behind to control the right of them to do that, do that, do that…

**Okay, so what is most important to you?**

I think now its family, peaceful.

**What does Hong Kong’s future look like?**

I think continues the Hong Kong spirit. In Hong Kong, from my- actually, I am quite old now, over 45- I love it in the past. When I am child, my mum and daddy told me Hong Kong people is working very hard. They working very hard, they could get what they want. But seems now the people are reluctant to work hard. They just want to sit here and get anything they want. I want everyone can work hard and play hard because you cannot get anything without effort. They always complain but they don’t think they need to do some more.

**Part 2**

**What’s Hong Kong’s attitude towards learning English?**

Learning English- a lot of opportunity. Because you know in kindergarten they have chance to learn English and now in primary school they also have a lot of opportunity to learn English. And they also, we also can employ some tutor- they can teach them English. So, I think in Hong Kong teach English is good and a lot of opportunity.

**And why do you think people want to learn English?**

Because we need to communicate worldwide. Because when we are working and you are in Hong Kong you will face a lot of different people and a lot of people coming to Hong Kong studying and maybe working, so you need to meet a lot of different people. Most of them they speak English. And Mandarin now is the second language in Hong Kong because in the primary school we have two major languages. One is Mandarin one is English…

**So not Cantonese?**

No, because they assume you know, you well know Cantonese. So, no need to practise and no need to further learn about it.

**Ah, so what was the main reason you got a tutor from England?**

I want them to increase the contact of the English, because in our place we never speak English at home. So, I want them to branch out, to have an interest in learning English. So, it is the… I want them to develop the base line so they have an interest in and they to speak, and also increase their opportunity to speak with foreigner.

**So, you said earlier that you had a tutor after me who wasn’t very good? What was it that didn’t work?**

I think the attitude. Sometimes they miss the class very late notice. And sometimes when I have some comments or opinions about what they learn or maybe, I mean, the program, they just very- I don’t know how to say- not very… the attitude is not very good. When I compare, I feel some differences. I think because they think about there is a lot of opportunities to teaching other children in Hong Kong, so when you always complain and when you have some negative comments so they want to quit.

**So how did it affect [your children] having an English tutor?**

You mean learning English? They speak English- this is the first one. They would like to learn English and like to with the English song. And I think because learning English is one of my hopes they could approach when they are child, when I approach you to teach them English. Now I can see they have a basic, very basic knowledge. In primary school they can learn English and know the English program very easy and catch up very easily. So [my child] got a very good mark in Primary 1. All of the items she got grade A; conversation, comprehension, listening.

**When people talk about ‘the West’ or someone being ‘Western’, what does that mean?**

I think it’s not negative. From my understanding it’s not negative. I mean, ‘Western’, what do you mean?

**Quite often people say ‘Hong Kong is quite Western. It’s like China but more Western’. I want to understand what that means.**

I think it means Chinese and Western mixed together. Because in Hong Kong I think is a multi-national multi-culture. And the schools it is also they have some mission, some mission or some knowledge that meet West with China.

**But what does ‘West’ mean?**

‘West’ means ‘not China’. I think mostly its Europe, USA.

**So, it’s to do with place? Is there anything about culture? What’s Western culture?**

More open. More friendly. More active.

**End of interview.**

**Clair Transcript**

Bio: Clair was born in Hong Kong and has studied and worked overseas in Australia and Canada. She now works as a clinical pharmacist in Hong Kong. I used to tutor her daughter, who attends one of the best secondary schools in Hong Kong.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like?**

Hong Kong: it’s very hot and it’s a tropical country; lots of people; it’s a very busy city, not too many quite places, like for leisure, vacation or things like that. They do, but I think the life in Hong Kong is too busy. I don’t really have time to explore - too busy - especially [as] I work full time, and also, you know, I need to help my child for studying. And also, studying in Hong Kong is very, very busy, and that’s why I need to help my daughter. I become super busy.

**What does a working day look like for you?**

Actually, I start at 9 until 5. So, that’s not too bad, but the problem is I’m on shift as well. Sometimes, I have to work the nightshift which is from 2 until 10 o’clock, which is okay, and then I also need to work on Saturday until 1 o’clock. And then I also roster on some public holidays on Sunday as well, which is happen I think last year. And there’s only just seven pharmacists to roster on the public holiday on Sunday, so, it can be very intense. And, if it is public holiday, I need to work until 5 but if it’s only Sunday I need to work until 1. And then I need to have the night shift duty around five times per month. So you can imagine from Monday to Friday, which is supposed I have to follow [my daughter’s] homework and everything and then, so I don’t have one or two night on every week. And then on Sunday I have to work sometimes- so just about every seven weeks. So, that’s how busy it is. Because we only got some pharmacists to roster on the Sunday. So, for the public holiday that’s a different roster.

But it’s still better than before, because I used to work in a hospital that is overnight, 24 hours. But I didn’t like it, because in Australia you don’t need to have overnight shifts. So, when I was pregnant, I decided to come back to the clinic instead of working in the hospital.

**Can you describe Hong Kong culture?**

I would say the culture is international and it’s a mix of traditional Chinese and Western, because a lot of Chinese obviously went overseas before or they studied overseas sometimes so they… bit of mixed. Like people will not speak one hundred percent Chinese or the Chinese standard is not as high as in China, as China Chinese. So, I would say it’s a mix. Like the English standard is a bit higher than in China. So, it’s mixed, is international.

**What’s the political atmosphere like in Hong Kong at the moment?**

Well I’m actually very blind in political things. So, I think the only thing for me- because I don’t vote, I don’t do anything, I’m not a very good citizen- so because I don’t really know very much about politics but only just heard it from the news. But I think I didn’t really like it- I don’t know what to say- I didn’t really like the view.

I have a very subjective view like when I was in Australia or when I was in Canada, and maybe because I was young, the politicians to me they are very smart, like the decision making is very good- only from my point of view at that time, of course. I was in high school. And then I thought those people are very smart and I believed that they would do the best for the citizens like in Canada or Australia. But and then when I come to Hong Kong, and of course I’ve grown up, and then I realised that I… I heard the news a few year ago that a man- some sort of those members, you know like they have those seminars, I don’t even know the name of all those people- but anyway, one of those people, those members of the committee- you know like they meet to vote and if they win they become a member but if they don’t get voted by the people they will be nothing, they won’t get a job or even be a member - and I remember a few years ago that a man [who] was trying to vote and trying to persuade the people to vote for him, and then of course he was defeated and then he was on the TV program telling everyone how miserable he was now he has to take the MTR and then he doesn’t have the job and he has to save money, cannot drive anymore, he’s got no job but he’s still working very hard and trying to go another round, to vote for again. And then I thought- isn’t it that those people are supposed to be very smart? Even if you can’t be a government member, then you still be very smart and work in anywhere and everyone will be just so welcome. Like, you look at Bill Clinton and all those people, even you know our Hong Kong government, those people that just went back, and then if they don’t be a government or they don’t be a member, then lots of private companies will invite them to work in the company. So I was thinking- how can that be? Having members who, if they don’t get voted and they are nothing, and they have to take MTR. He was trying to tell everyone that, if he can’t be voted, say: ‘now I’m so miserable because you didn’t vote me and I’m nothing now, I need to take MTR, to eat bread and I don’t have any money. Now I have to work hard again, and I hope you vote me’.

But for the other part I’m more academic. I don’t get involved, so I can’t really give much.

**So, what’s your relationship to Hong Kong? Were you born here?**

I was born here, and then I went to study in high school in Canada, and then, when I was in university, my family immigrate to Australia because of the 1997. That was far before the 1997, but they prepare to leave. I think there was a rush- that everyone rush-out- and so I immigrated with them, because I was under a certain age- yeah, I was under twenty. So, I stayed there, and I did a masters there, worked there, and I got a job, and I worked in a hospital. But then I feel it was very boring! Because, in the whole hospital, I am the only one that is twenty something, and everyone is like forty or fifty or something. And it’s very boring every day, and then I work with the colleagues and they are talking about their children, their daughter, who is only one or two years younger, about the same age as me. And I feel I want to do something, I want to have fun, I want to do something while I’m still young.

So, I decide to come back to Hong Kong and work. And then I was preparing to work for just about two years and have fun. And then, of course, in that two years I have great fun and I work in a global company and I travel everywhere overseas, because in the hospital- I always saw in on the movie that the people from Hong Kong, when they work they can travel they have their own office, their own secretary, their office is very nice and then they travel overseas for meeting, and I really envy that- and so I thought I don’t just want to work in a hospital for the rest of my life, so I decided to come back to Hong Kong, because part of my family was in Hong Kong.

And then I met my husband in the hospital, because he is a doctor and he cannot practise in Australia. So, then I stay.

And I can tell the very, very cultural difference between Hong Kong and Australia by working in a hospital. Because I work in Queen Mary hospital, which is one of the two teaching hospitals in Hong Kong, and I can tell there is a big difference, because I also keep in touch with my friend. But I also have to compromise the pay, because obviously it’s a lot, lot higher in Hong Kong than in Australia, but of course the rights in Australia… Because I was educated in and also working in there, because I did my masters, I know what I’m supposed to have- like what rights I have. In Hong Kong you have no say. Because, in Australia, I know that if you are a working mum you can request that you only work for certain shifts but in Hong Kong you have no say. In Australia if you work over 5 you get double pay, and they work out exactly, you don’t have to bargain, you don’t have to negotiate, but in Hong Kong you have no choice and they force you to sign the agreement. So, I didn’t like that.

**So what are you main values? What’s most important to you?**

Family. I work because for my family. Maybe before I have a family, and maybe before- I was young- I think I should have my own career, I want to be outstanding, I want to be smart, but after I have a family you see that is not important.

**How do you feel about Hong Kong’s future? What does Hong Kong’s future look like?**

Actually, I don’t think I have the confidence for the Hong Kong future, but the problem is because I don’t really have much choice. Because, of course, the longer I stay in Hong Kong, the longer I will rely on all the things in Hong Kong. Like, if I go back to Australia, then I of course I think that I can still get a job, but the problem is in Hong Kong we have a helper. So, it helps because I have a helper so I can do a lot of thigs that I wanted, like I can save a lot of time. Even I work full time but I can help my daughter, but a lot of chores and a lot of donkey work that I don’t have to do it. But all my friends in Australia don’t have helper, unless you are very, very rich. It’s like you are taking a staff, like you’re actually recruiting a staff to work for you in the house, so it wouldn’t be very. In Hong Kong, like the helper most people can afford, but in Australia it’s like you have a staff and then I think: I may as well do it myself!

**And how do you think of Hong Kong’s past?**

Compared with now, I think in the past- you know, because I have been away, that would have been when I was in High school, so I didn’t really know too much about it- but I would say in the past it’s very Westernised. I know that, in the past, if you want to have your career it would be harder for a Chinese, because like maybe, in the past, most of the boss- the very top boss- they probably from UK, and it would be too hard for you to go up. But in Hong Kong it becomes the other way around, because I have a lot of friends that married to British or… yeah, and it’s no longer like that. Usually, they will not be the top boss anymore and I don’t have any boss in the hospital. So, you have to know how to speak Cantonese. I do have some departments, like doctor or professor, they are British or Caucasian, but, especially now, I don’t see any. Like they maybe just work under contract because we don’t have enough staff. So, I think the difference is like then, in Hong Kong, if your English is good then it’s almost like everything is good, but now I think the English is not as important. In the past, if you write any reports, I am sure has to be in English, even in the very low grade, but, now, some of the staff -if they like -they can write everything in Chinese.

**Part 2**

**What’s Hong Kong’s attitude in general towards learning English?**

I think the people still place emphasis on learning English, but I would say it’s not as important as maybe ten or twenty years ago. Like 20 years ago, if you were good in English then you can excel in the school but now- like in [my daughter’s year]- the requirement in English, I would say, is not high at all. They treat the English as a second language like even the DSE. The DSE- you know what is the DSE? That’s the highschool, just like your A Level, the exam that you get into university. The DSE: their requirement is like English as a second language. It’s not like maybe twenty years ago that you have to be very, very good in English. So, for [my daughter], she doesn’t. But, because I was planning maybe one day she will go back to Australia, or maybe because I like it, maybe because I study in Canada and Australia, that’s why I just feel that she should learn better English. But, actually, the school doesn’t require that high. I mean, she’s in one of the top highschools in Hong Kong- one of, either the top or the second- but their English level isn’t high. But most of the students in that school, they’re high maybe because from their family background, but it’s not required by DSE or by Hong Kong education.

But for Chinese, I can see that they’re trying to push the Chinese. Because like when I was little, or I was in highschool, the Chinese requirement is not high at all. I don’t study very, very good when I was little, but the Chinese I don’t have to pay and effort. I can do it- of course I am not the top, but I don’t really have to like have a tutorial or do a lot of work. But [my daughter] is actually spending almost ninety percent of her time or effort on Chinese. Because the others she finds easy- because I’m in the English school and so all the subjects are actually in English. So, she have no problem for the other subjects. But the Chinese requirements are so high because the BSE requirements for Chinese. I think they’re trying to be comparable to the standard in Beijing.

**Do you speak Chinese at home or mainly English?**

When [my daughter] was little, we speak mainly English, but, and then when she got into Primary 1, I realised that she have a lot of trouble because I think she didn’t learn Chinese, or didn’t even speak Chinese until she was 6 years old, maybe 4 or 5. And then when she was in Primary 1, we realised that the requirement for Chinese is very, very high and if you just do it like in international school then you can’t even pass it. So, that’s why we spend lots of time catching up, because she likes English first and that’s why it’s always behind. And she doesn’t really like to read the Chinese book- that’s why it’s hard to be very good.

So, I think the difference is after 1997 the demand for Chinese standard is very, very high compared with before 1997.

**And do you think that’s likely to change in 2047?**

Yeah because- and this is only subjectively- I think that China they want the students and us to be more comparable to the standard in China. And then because, I don’t know, maybe because they don’t want us to be so good in English, because they are much lower. So, they try to make a balance. So, the requirement is not high- we will not push ourselves so Chinese in going up and Chinese is going down. So, it becomes very close to them. And then we are not… it doesn’t feel like we are more superior to them. They will be balance out and then there will be no longer any advantage over the Chinese because your English like- your new generation- they are all just like them.

**Can you describe your experiences with Western tutors- good or bad- or the experiences that people you know have had?**

They are good. But I can tell - but this is not really my experience - but one thing I can tell the difference, because a lot of my friends sometimes they didn’t really like to have Western English tutor, the reason is because, you know, like in Hong Kong studying is different from just picking up the accents, conversation, everything? When you actually talking about academic, you need to know all the grammar and everything. You can’t just say I feel like this is the right thing. And also, like a lot of Westerner they learn the English but not the grammar. They don’t need to learn the grammar. They don’t need to learn: ‘oh, this is the way to do it’, or explain, but for me it is different. So, like [my daughter] learnt it when she was born and then she not learning the grammar bit by bit in order to understand how to speak English. She learn it when watching TV and playing games and interacting with the Westerner. I like it that way. But maybe some of the Hong Kong people they picked it up by reading the English storybook and they learnt that maybe: ‘oh, when you have a boy, you have to have subject, pronoun and things like that’. So, when they have an English or Western tutor, if they want them to correct them then it will be hard for the Westerner to explain, because you just know this is the way. But, of course, if you ask them… so, just like when you ask me in Chinese and I will just say it naturally. But if you say, ‘would that be different from this sentence?’ or ‘which one is correct?’ maybe I can’t tell the difference because I didn’t really learn the grammar in that way.

And also, for the Western tutor, when they doing the conversation mostly you adopt positive reinforcement. That means: ‘I’ll let you write whatever you want, and then, whatever you write, I can inspire you and tell you how you can better’, or, ‘doesn’t matter because she can just write the way she want and when she picked it up, afterwards she can write better, or reading more books and talking more or watching more TV’. But for Chinese, if they don’t read the lot of books or watch a lot of TV, like if their environment is not all in English, when they doing the conversation- just like [my daughter] doing the Chinese composition- it will be hard, because the Western tutor they won’t tell your grammar is wrong, or, ‘you have to write this way, you have to correct it, this is wrong, bad, you don’t do it like this.’ You are very encouraging, but in the school she will get very bad marks. So, that’s why maybe, if you get a Chinese tutor who is good in English she knows all of them like she can teach you the grammar, she can correct bit by bit, ‘this is wrong, this is slang, you can’t do it like this’. And when they’re doing the composition like this way, the student will not be very creative. Whenever she wants to write something, she’s like ‘you’re wrong, this is bad English.’

And also, the English tutor, the Western tutor, especially if they teach in the government school, they don’t really have the responsibility, because they don’t really mind about academic. They don’t really mind about the marks, but for Chinese English tutor or teacher, they very mind. Like everything- ‘the ‘A’ you didn’t write very nice, it shouldn’t have a tail, it should be straight’, but I’ve never seen a Westerner criticise how you’re writing it or how your conversation.

**So, they have less responsibility? Do you think that comes across in the attitude of some Western tutors?**

Some of them, I would say. It depends on what kind of Western English teacher that you recruit. If you just want some… I remember, I was trying to get a teacher in English literature and then I remember the agent keep telling me, ‘oh, this is English literature.’ I said, ‘this is comparative literature.’ They said, ‘it’s still in English!’ But if you… in Hong Kong it doesn’t matter. I remember one of my friends looked, asked, ‘is this a good English tutor?’ I said: ‘This is from Poland. You want a European teaching English? This is not her mother tongue, and she speak with an accent too, very strong!’ And then she said, ‘oh really, it doesn’t matter because they…’

In Hong Kong, I don’t think they recruit all the English teachers they all have a high standard background. Maybe they’re just in business, marketing; they can just in any area. Maybe when they are doing the highschool they don’t like to do the Shakespeare but they just passed through it, so, and then how can you ask them to teach you? And some of them, I know that in highschool you don’t teach grammar, it’s totally nothing in our English literature subject now. So, you ask someone that only speak with very good English and then they teach English- they can’t teach you anything. So, that’s why they expect to maybe just talk to you.

**So, we keep talking about ‘the West’ or someone being ‘Western’. What does western mean?**

For me Western means: ‘not in Hong Kong’. In the west side. In Asia, there are still some like India, Pakistan. Those are not western to me. In the west side, so, like in Europe its west, in Australia, in Canada, those are west.

**So, it’s about place? Anything to do with culture? When people talk about Hong Kong being more Western- what elements of Hong Kong make it more Western?**

Because we were a British colony. So, I would say the ‘Western’- it’s more British, because a lot of British comes to Hong Kong, of course, a lot of Canadian, a lot of American, lots of Australian.

**So, it’s about the people who migrate here?**

I would say it’s about the culture too. I would refer to the few main countries like Canada, USA, Australia, UK; the English speaking countries.

**So, if someone’s Western, how do they behave?**

In Hong Kong? Most of them, to me, they’re usually very polite, because that’s the way they are, not because they come to Hong Kong and become very polite. Even when I went to there, when I was in Canada or Australia, they are all very nice, very polite and they have a certain culture. They don’t like… they will line up and just trivial things like when you go in a lift, you press the button or hold the door for somebody, you don’t just go in and the door goes bang. You usually just open it and hold it. But some of the Chinese, they talk to me and say, ‘oh that’s hypocritical’. I don’t agree at all because this is their character, that’s their culture. They want to be like that, not because they try to do it and show it to you, but this is politeness. Even like- let’s say their competitor, they don’t like it, but they have a certain way. I think especially when you come to work. Even if there’s something you don’t like, you still have some manner.

**End of interview**

**Danielle Transcript**

Bio: Danielle was born in Hong Kong and lives in Tsing Yi. I used to tutor her teenage daughter, studying for the International Baccalaureate.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like? Can you explain its geography and its landscape?**

You mean its size or location?

**If someone asked you to describe what Hong Kong looks like?**

Okay, I would say Hong Kong is part of the China and it is in Asia. It is a very convenient place that we can go to all the other countries.

**How would go describe Hong Kong culture?**

I would say it is a bit of a mixture of Western and traditional Chinese. As the time that people meet more Western people, they are more open-minded, and many of them, in fact, are very Western style. They like to go to the like the USA, UK, other countries. Although part of them, some of them, are also stick to the Chinese culture.

**And what is the Chinese culture?**

I would say it is more conservative. That is like something have to do, or something should have to do, to be behave or behaves - something like that. Other than more creative or open-minded.

That is a little bit mixture of both.

**And what is Hong Kong’s political atmosphere like?**

At the moment, in terms of the political situation, you say, it is really tense because there is two parties. It is quite… they are fraught. They are quite extreme. One is minded to be more democracy. The other is more: ‘no you are not’- like a father, like a mother, doing it that way. So, I don’t think it is healthy. We are not comfortable about it.

But in terms of education, I would say it is okay. But as you know, I am not satisfied with that also. That is why I send my girl to a more neutral school. That’s what I say is a bit of Western and a bit of have some Chinese cultural experience, like a balance of both things, not just western or one-side. This is what I think.

**So, are some schools heavily one way or the other?**

For the traditional one, they call it local school, they have the system that is only one way and they have more like, like the education system is more like spoon-feed. This is what I am not quite appreciating. And they have a lot of homework. Think that they need to do a lot of memorizing instead of a lot of creative, can have a bit of leisure life. This is what I think.

**What’s your relationship to Hong Kong?**

I was born in Hong Kong, so, I’m purely a Hong Kong people. And to me it’s okay! I love Hong Kong! I like the convenience, because have many place that we can go, and the trips that we need to travel are really short and really convenient. The food that is available in Hong Kong is really, really good. Have many- although some of them are like fusion one not the real one or the tradition one- but we can have a change of taste it. And, also, the clothes is not such expensive, it is affordable. And, also, we can meet a lot of people. So, I enjoy it.

But this is the way that the lifestyle. But in the other parts of life, the political and the educational, it is not… to me, it is not quite comfortable about it.

**What are your main values? What’s most important to you?**

Okay, I think, to me, we need to be responsible, we need to be respect people, and, also, we like people to care us, or we need to also concern other peoples. We also need to enjoy our life.

**So how do you feel about Hong Kong’s future? What does Hong Kong’s future look like?**

It’s really hard to say. I don’t know for sure. But now the situation is more… when people talk about this, also, they always talk about political issues. Like even if, like the university students, part of the like… they have to deal with the situation also. And it also spread to the university. This is the idea that what they… I think it is quite fact their way of life- no, their way of thinking. I’m not quite comfortable about the university students who have such an act or the activity, and I don’t think the people need to comment on what the students do. In fact, I support the student. My way of thinking: because students are still young, they not, they cannot be, politically effective. Thinking to discuss the issues, not telling them this is right or wrong. That is what I think. Yes, but, if they act out when they are a more mature age, what they should do, they should have to be responsible. I think this is one of the ways. This is more important.

**And how do you think of Hong Kong’s past?**

I am not a good person to comment on that, but I think that I- I am not also old enough- but I remember the things. The time that I when I was young, that was governed by UK, that time was good. But this is from more of my memory. The education system- people always comment on that- but I think this is a way that looking back and looking of the other education system in the other country. I think the UK’s education system is really good and it give Hong Kong a lot of freedom, and the students are more, the standard of English is more good. And, also, the way that they govern Hong Kong is more- I would say- more organised, more co-ordinated and you see the harmony was there, but, now, I don’t know. Now, I just sense a manner is worry about if the situation is getting worse.

**Part 2**

**What is Hong Kong’s attitude in general towards learning English?**

I think that people consider it is really important. English is really important, although, now, there is the Putonghua is important. Chinese is important, too, but English, like, they before, it is a first language in Hong Kong, so we must be in order to get a good job or in order to get promoted your English what is spoken and writing skills must be really, really good. So, it is demanding and we need to be good.

**And where has that attitude come from?**

I think it is come from all parties. This is because there is a need for it. So, that’s why people will put effort or our resources improving ourselves in English. If you know it is important, then you need to study hard and you need to be polished.

**So, can you describe your own experiences or the experiences of people you know, good or bad, with Western tutors?**

I think that we are lucky with meet a lot of English tutor who are really good. This is what our experience. But one of the ones is we change a lot of English tutors, like the frequency is quite high, like maybe one year we need to change another one. The other year we need to change another one or sometimes three months we need to change. The reasons why? It’s not they are not good. The reason is they usually come from overseas and they have a contract, like a teachers contract, and then they don’t know for sure how long they can stay, or they have another plan. And, I will say, the teachers are also very active or they have their own way of thinking or they have… they came to Hong Kong for some experience, they want to seek for some experience, after maybe one year they gain the experience and they would like to move on to another country. So, that’s why we change a lot. But this is not only say the same the English tutor, because still happens in our girl’s school. The English teachers, they change the school or they quit quite often. This is always happen in Western culture. Maybe they are more like, I cannot say relaxed, they have more freedom and they will plan what they’re going to do in the next years. Other than Chinese people, they are more: if they like a job or if they do one thing, they will stay like three years, four years, five years. This is what happens in Chinese culture. This is a little bit of difference.

**So how do you think having a Western tutor, or even that Western tutors move around a lot, how has that affected [your daughter]?**

Of course, if there is a new tutor she needs to adjust or take time to familiarise their selves with each other, and, also, need to adjust the teaching style. But I think, because my friend, who is the one who was to choose the tutor, she was very demanding, so I don’t need to do the hiring part. I was one of her partner, so she was the one to choose, select the best tutor for us. So, I am lucky, but, for [my daughter], I think maybe this is a good experience too because, as we change the tutor, she will - they have different ways of teaching styles. And also, so far, it doesn’t affect her, and you will say that academically it doesn’t affect her very much. In fact, it’s one of the components that to guide her. It’s not a major one. You know, she has to study herself, but even if something coming up- an exam- tutor can guide her, give her experience, guiding her something like that. So, is good.

**What are you main reasons for employing an English tutor?**

To us, we would like [our daughter’s] English to be better. This is a chief objective. And also, like when [she] was young, her English level can be a bit better than the grade that she is used. So maybe, I will say, to be more advanced. So, that’s why we would like to get someone to help her. And especially we like… I know language is really important. So, I would like someone to get more good in this area with her. And also, Western tutor can give her like, the spoken part, with be more strong and more confidence when she speak English in front of people. And also, I think individual is very important. Like when I, when you do the tutoring with her, it’s really good you can use the novels or use the books to discuss with her- especially like the literature part- teach her the appreciation part. I think it arouse her, not just the language, and also discuss the background, the characters, the different parts, and it is really good that this is a variety of different things, not just language, not just grammar, and, also, how to deal with information, how to write creative essays, and organise the information, how to analyse the information, how to understand the comprehension part, how to do the questions. This is the sort of things that can help- tutor can help.

**Does your daughter have a tutor now?**

No, she doesn’t. But just wondering if you could help her like when she do the application for university. Like they do need to write the essay about themselves. This is something that is really hard. For UK, one they say you just write one piece of work but then the UCAS it’s okay, the more academic one, but for the US it’s really hard. They just evaluate how you - it’s not evaluate your academic - it’s evaluate how you’re more mature. They choose the more mature and the way your experience, the values, other things. It’s really hard to juggle with that.

[My daughter’s] program now is quite hard. It is quite intense. They say this is opposite way of IGCSE. Maybe ten times of the work you need to, but because this program can be recognised by the university- I don’t know if UK recognise- but in the USA they recognise it as the first year of university. Yes, they can ask for credits, but some of them do not grant one-year credits, they just grant… but it all depends on the faculty also. If it is a professional one, they may not get credits. They need to do a lot of… besides the… they need to study six subjects. Maths, Chinese, English, and then choose other three. Yes, she chose Arts, physics and, also, history. So, it’s a bit of everything. They have to. This is they have no choice. They have to choose one humanities one, one science, and the other is they choose. Since she have a choice, so she choose arts. Other than that, they can choose another subject of science or humanities. Besides of that, they have to do two more things. Is one called TOK, have you heard about it? Technical theory. Theory of Knowledge. Like you need to analyse things, you need to like a philosophy. I don’t know you like say one thing can every topic. You can put it and then you need to analyse. It’s hard! Theory of knowledge and the other one is, they call it, CAS [Creative Activity and Service]. It is activities, so you need to do a lot of volunteer work and there’s not only one. Some of them are continues, some are more you need to learn something with other people in short time, long time, like over these two years. Just need to arrange a lot of activities and arrange all the times. Really, really, really!

**Earlier on you used the phrase ‘the West’. What do you mean when you talk about the West? Where does in refer to and what does it mean?**

‘The West’, that is what I say, ‘is not Chinese’. That is the West! But I always refer to ‘West’ is maybe this is what the country deny have contact with, like UK, like US, like Australia. This is the part that I more familiar. It’s not saying the one in Russia, in Spain, not like that, because, to my experience, I’ve been to these three countries. So I, Australia, I stayed five years living there, including my studying. UK and US, I did travel in different time and different places in these two countries. So, what I have contact with is these country and this style, these cultural.

**So, it’s more or a cultural thing than a place?**

Yes, yes. But it’s a bit difficult because the definition you need to define it and how people… and always people will have different perspectives.

It’s a bit difficult for us because we are a country of China, but all the way we live and we born is Hong Kong. Even we have a lot of freedom. But it’s just something they do, and the people do not agree, and the way of they are governing now it’s some way only. We think it is not good but in fact we cannot control it. Yes, we cannot control it and they just do it and people say like… And now, also, it included the students.

**So, you said you were in Australia, where were you in Australia?**

Sydney. That is my family immigrate to Australia a long time ago, so I went with them. I study, I was studying in The University of Sydney at the time, and then, after that, I came back.

Very small, right? Very quiet. I need to use this word ‘closed-minded’. Yes, they are a bit of left behind, do you agree?

**Do you think coming from Hong Kong shaped your opinion?**

Yes. You meet a lot of people, lot of food. Convenience is the most important. When you hungry and go everywhere and buy many things. Just like Seven Eleven. There’s so many in one street! So, that‘s good.

**End of interview**

**Elise Transcript**

Bio: Elise, originally from Taiwan, now lives in Hong Kong, where her seven-year-old daughter attends an international school.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like?**

A busy city. A busy city, a fashion, you know, the top fashion area is. Everything is high street or fashions. But the education, all, I think is faster than the other countries. Maybe just, you know, two years, first or one years, first. You know what I mean? That is fastest.

**How would you describe Hong Kong culture?**

Long history. All keep very well, you know, like the buildings. They keep very well. Describe… When I say that, it’s okay? Just long history. And you know the government or the people they all keep it well. We need to keep until one hundred years more or one hundred years just protect it.

**Okay, and how do the people in Hong Kong behave?**

Behave?

**Yes. What do people in Hong Kong act like?**

Rush. When I say that, I feel everything is so rushed. Rush and very direct. They’re not shy, not shy to do the things, very direct- even the talking, the actions. Talking, actions and they’re not shy. Everything is so direct. So, if you live in Hong Kong – don’t be shy!

**What’s the political atmosphere like in Hong Kong?**

Political? What is that?

**The government, how the country is run…**

They have a… very restraint.

**What do you mean?**

Hong Kong is belong China. Yes, they use different ways to control Hong Kong. I mean, there’s more freedoms, but they’re still worried that one day belong to China. They use China as way to charge Hong Kong. So, not many people happy, I am sure. Yes, even the students from the university they fighting this.

**The Occupy Central, the Umbrella…?**

Yes, just like that.

**Did you support that?**

Yes, it’s about this.

**What’s your relationship to Hong Kong? Were you born here, when did you come here?**

Me? My husband is from UK, but his parents is move back to Hong Kong, and I’m from Taiwan, and he move back to Hong Kong to have a job here, working here. So, yes, I’m marry with him, so I started moving to Hong Kong. Now, I stay in Hong Kong, and I have a children in Hong Kong. Yes, so I’m living here.

**And do you like living here?**

Yes, so far, I am happy. I am starting enjoy.

**What are your main values? What’s most important to you?**

Most important to me? Now? Now, I have a kids, now, it’s for the education. So far, it’s for the education, because many people fighting for the school aspects. So, so far, it’s my child education.

**How do you feel about Hong Kong’s future? What does the future look like in Hong Kong?**

I think will be the same, yes, the same. I think it just keep the same. Just keep the same, better, because we don’t want, you know, one day come in, China government come in to control the Hong Kong and that will be change it.

**Do you think that will happen?**

Hope it’s not happen, but I’m not sure. You never know what they do next day! So, I want just keep like this. Everyone is get on with their own job. They get everything they want. That’s now.

**And when you think of Hong Kong’s past, what do you think about?**

Before? Past is: Hong Kong many people work hard, work hard, and, because they work hard, have now. And now is… So, yes, we are thankful for those people. Those people is view of Hong Kong. Yes, I think it’s like that. Think many country, many places like that, yes. So, I think it’s just those people view of Hong Kong. So, I’m happiness. That’s why.

**Part 2**

**What’s Hong Kong’s attitude in general to learning English?**

Need to improve. I think need to improve a lot, because, like, you use the school where you study, then you should choose to learn the English from there. And it’s different what school gives you. And some of the local, more local schools… You should learn more from the international school. Local, they maybe just have one of teacher in the school. That’s not enough, not enough.

So, need to improve, now also. Because mainly people, even in school, the teacher who teach English is from Hong Kong. Hong Kong needs English. The pronounce sounds like Hong Kong English. I think its need to improve a lot, a lot.

**So, where do you think that attitude has come from?**

Of course, further study. For the students study, connect to another country, the other school, and a job. Job, of course, some of - in the future- they got a job, of course, you can learn more English, learn more language, that you can talk in others. I think social. In here, social is, everything is- go final. Everything studied, actually. Go final is: go for the business. It’s: you study to go for, you know, go forward. Of course, now, you know when children is my age, what we like is future, is for your work.

**How would you describe your own experience of Native English Teachers?**

I hope all the native teachers is from the, you know, from the other countries like America, like UK or, you know, they use English. They really just speak English is their mother language. I want like that. I want like… It’s like me, of course, I’m nothing good, my pronounce is not perfect, because I learn from the local. It’s not my mother language- it’s different. Not from.

**Okay, so the Native Teachers you know, who you’ve met, and who have taught at one of the schools, have you had any good experiences with them, or any bad experiences with them?**

So far, it’s good experience.

**Do you know anyone who’s had bad experiences with them?**

Not really. So far, it’s good.

**Okay. How do you think being in an International school has impacted [your daughter]? How has it helped her or not helped her?**

Of course, for the language. English language and the things they study. Otherwise the things she learn is too traditional, too traditional. I want her to open-mind. You want to do the thing, you have different ways to finish it, to do it. I want to open more thinking, different ways to arrange things, and I want that.

**Are there any other reasons you sent [your daughter] to an international school instead of a local school?**

Yes, there are so many reasons. The first reason- If compared local school and international school, local school do things traditional. Traditional is not change. Maybe the change, maybe, but its more tradition. The international school is more opening. Everything is more - it’s not everything - maybe more free, more thinking, more active. I think international is many more activities. I want my kids like that. It’s not just for study, not just for study. I want like open-mind and more active.

And, of course, the teacher, English teacher. Teaching, I know that, in local school, suppose one or two English teacher in this school. It’s not many. And in International school you know there is some more, maybe one per class. English teacher totally different.

**If we talk about ‘the West’, or if we say somebody is ‘Western’, or ‘Hong Kong is quite Western’, what does that mean?**

I think it’s the information. Information is important. People get it – informations - different. Information and the fashion is different. I mean, fashion is really important for the… because people, usually, people walk out, they look, they see, it’s different. Yeah, what they see, what they listen. The look is different.

**Can you give an example?**

Okay so like trainers. Training. Maybe in China it’s not the fashion, you know, not that improve, because China too much fake. The word that we use- fake. Too much like… The electronics you see, you use, that’s improve, that’s different, and the clothes, dressing style, and the shopping centre, the restaurant. Of course, some of thee, you know, you need to keep the traditional. The restaurant- it’s good. But you know some different, new, its ideas, and the design. That’s the fashion: some new. Of course, still keep the old style but add the new things that become introduced. So, that’s important.

**So, that’s the end of the formal interview. Is there anything else? I’ll tell you what I’m trying to research. So, when Western academia talks about Hong Kong, they say, ‘it’s not China, and it’s not the West’, ‘it’s not China or England’, ‘it’s inbetween’. So, I’m trying to represent Hong Kong without talking about other places. Does that make sense? I’m trying to talk about Hong Kong without saying, ‘it’s different from China’, or ‘it’s different from America’, or ‘it’s different from England’.**

You know, England control Hong Kong before. Is that say that? ‘Control’? So, Hong Kong still keep the style from that, I think, still. It’s much still from that. Not change much since China get it. It’s not change much. Not change very much.

**Do you think it will, in the future?**

It’s just government change. I think the lifestyle still. We will not change for the, you know… People stays the same. I think just the government change.

**Can you say a little more?**

Okay. Hong Kong want independence. Don’t want China to control. It’s like Taiwan. You know they always say ‘Taiwan is belong to the China’. ‘We are all Chinese’, they say, ‘we’re all Asia, part of China’. So, China want to use the same way to control Taiwan. One country, two ways- they do that. So, they want to do the same with Hong Kong, but even - no, I should say that they even this way in Hong Kong, they want to do the same to Taiwan. So, Taiwan still fighting this. Many cases fighting for this. Hong Kong it just wants its independence, don’t want China to control. But if they control, if China control, there is many army and, you know, or some… can I say this?! Many students…

**Did people think that the protests would be successful? Did you think they would work?**

No. Not really. It’s just you know we are… It’s just a chance to show up what people… They just want to show what people… It will not work, trust me. China is very high, and even, you know the leaders, the top leaders from Hong Kong is, you know, from China to arrange. They just let Hong Kong people to do the election, but the people you election, they still control.

**I know there were a lot of people who had businesses in Mong Kok who were against the protests…?**

No. I think the business, they will still keep, because everywhere need the business. Even China control here, they will still keep the business. It will never change. Business does make money. Never change. All country need to forward thinking like that. So, I mean, China, if they control Hong Kong the government, many will like this, but I think for our government people will change many.

**Do many Hong Kong people think Hong Kong should be governed by China?**

I have hear that. I have hear just like that. It’s just like this: is more, the situation, right now, is okay. It’s okay. It’s not change, better to not change. People have a home, people have a work, people, you know, study, they happy for everything. They have enough. They don’t want to change any. It’s like right now. And if you too much to, you know, like 2014, then you not happy. Even I’m happy say that. What if you see, you see the army just walking? And now, that be different. Different, big change. So, from a parent, from my husbands… They say that now, like that, it’s okay. They happy for days now. Don’t want to do any, you know, doing too much change.

**End of interview**

**Freya Transcript**

Bio: Freya is from Indonesia but now lives in Hong Kong with her husband, who is from Japan. Their two children, aged seven and ten, attend international school, but are in the process of moving to a Japanese school in Hong Kong.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like?**

For me, Hong Kong is a multi-culture, and hectic, a rush. It’s so different from Indonesia. There, is so laid back and relaxed. Actually, I like Hong Kong people. They want things very fast and quick. You know in Seven Eleven? In the morning, if they want to grab something, they line up so long but they can be fast because they use the Octopus [payment card]. It’s very good. In Indonesia, we don’t have things like that.

**Where in Indonesia are you from?**

Central Java. Yes.

**Okay. What’s Hong Kong culture like?**

What do you mean?

**Attitudes and…**

No, not good!

**What do you mean?**

They are very rude! Yes, and they not patient. You know when you went to dimsum, and you ask for water or what, the waitress will be annoyed by that because they are like so busy. For me, it’s not good!

**How does the political atmosphere feel in Hong Kong?**

Very tense, very tense, because after Hong Kong is back to China, they people prefer the Britain. They do not like the China policy.

**And what’s your relationship to Hong Kong?**

My husband used to live in Hong Kong. When he was small, his Daddy in Hong Kong, he became a resident. So, after he graduate from Australia, he couldn’t find a job there, so he moved back to Hong Kong. Sydney, we met there. He told me that it’s easier to find a job in Hong Kong because they want a Japanese can speak English. Many Japanese companies in Hong Kong, and they looking for the one can speak English. Many Japanese couldn’t speak English!

**And do you like Hong Kong?**

First no, because I need to walk so much, and it’s so crowded, so crazy, but, after living for one or two years, I get used to it and I become faster!

**So what would you say is most important to you in general?**

My children, family. As long as they live safely. Especially living in Hong Kong is safe, for me, than living in Indonesia because Indonesia is quite racist to Chinese. Because I’m Indonesian-Chinese, I’m not a native, so they treat us differently. Hong Kong have no issue like that. They only have issue with the mainland Chinese but not with the foreigners. So, we are safe!

**How do you feel about Hong Kong’s future? What does Hong Kong’s future look like?**

Not sure, because the currency before was stronger than China, but after the handover days it’s getting dropped. And especially they want to be independent.

**Do you think that will happen?**

That will not happen. China is so strong. They have so many army- millions! They can attack Hong Kong.

**So, you think it will become more Chinese?**

Yes, surely, and then the economy is going down in these few years.

**If I said Hong Kong’s past, what do you think of?**

Hong Kong’s past was more peaceful, because now is very tense between Chinese and the Hong Kong.

**And when you say the past are you talking five years ago, ten years, twenty years…?**

I’m not sure, because I’m not living in Hong Kong, but I can remember when I was small, before China came over to Hong Kong, and I felt quite different.

**Part 2**

**First of all, what is Hong Kong’s attitude in general towards learning English?**

It’s quite okay, it’s easy. Actually, I noticed the older people in Hong Kong have good English. They can speak better English than the younger ones. I’m not really sure. Because they used to be under the British, so they can speak English quite well. So, maybe like middle-aged, fifty, sixty plus, I’m quite surprised because they can speak very good.

**But the younger people can’t so much?**

I’m not sure because some of the rich Hong Kong they went overseas- Canada, Australia for study - but the middle, lower economic range they stay in Hong Kong. They couldn’t speak good English.

**So, in kindergartens and schools then, do you think there is a pressure to learn English? Do you think it’s seen as something that’s important?**

I think so.

**Okay, so can you describe you own experiences with the NETs or with Western tutors?**

Not really.

**Okay, so when [your children] were in the international school, how were the Native English Teachers?**

I think their English is not good. The standard is very low of the local teacher.

**The English teachers?**

Ah, they’re okay, but, once they have the sick leave, they change the teacher.

**Okay. So how do you think it impacted [your children] sending them to an international school?**

Helps them to learn more perfect English, good English. Unfortunately, the kindergarten depends on the area. If the kindergarten was closer to the New Territories: lower than the Hong Kong Island, because Hong Kong Island is high class, so the English is much better, and in the New Territories more kids from mainland Chinese. They couldn’t speak good English, so actually it affects my kids to learn good English.

**So, they didn’t learn English as well as you’d hoped?**

No, they learned English but the slang is Hong Kong slang. Teacher is okay. Only the classmate influence. But the teacher is quite okay, like [my son’s previous English teacher] he teach good English to [my son].

**Okay, so the way he taught his class- was that different from the way the local teachers might teach?**

Ah yes. They’re more disciplined I think. The Chinese is maybe more laid back. This is my view.

**So, what were the main reasons then that you send [your children] to an international school?**

Obviously for us, we are international, we are not Hong Kong people, Hong Kong family. We want them to learn English, because in the future we’re not sure we’re going to live in Hong Kong.

**If we talk about someone being ‘Western’ or from ‘the West’ what does that mean to you?**

You mean more foreigners come here? Yeah, more multi-culture.

**Can you explain what aspects of culture would come from the West?**

Difficult.

**Okay, no problem. Anything else you feel is relevant or important if I’m trying to represent Hong Kong? What defines Hong Kong?**

Mostly the food. It’s so different, right, in England and Hong Kong? Mostly my friend from Singapore, almost every year come to Hong Kong because of the food, and they are always hunting the food. They follow the Instagram, you know the blogger?

**So, what is the food that’s unique to Hong Kong?**

The Hong Kong’s people like the... you know like some Japanese food. New Japanese food store in Hong Kong- they will come to this.

**What is Hong Kong food?**

That is the dimsum, you know the cute character dimsum, but it’s just a few years. After that, they not come for any more. Dimsum and the breakfast. They told me the breakfast is unique. For me, I don’t like it.

Ah yes, and I remember this one time. I remember this [journalist] came in Hong Kong and called it China dimsum and Hong Kong people say, ‘it is not! We are not China’.

They just hate China.

**Do you think Hong Kong is different from China?**

They are just part of China. China is… Hong Kong more are more arrogant. China people feel Hong Kong is part of them, but Hong Kong people think Chinese people is impolite, they don’t want to line up. Because I was in the middle, like, between them - Chinese friend and Hong Kong friend - and that’s what they told me.

**What differences do you think there are?**

For me, none. I can feel the Hong Kong friend is a bit more arrogant but some is nice. The Chinese are nice too actually. Why they have this conflict?

**End of interview**

**Gail Transcript**

Bio: Gail was born in Hong Kong, has two high-school age children, and works in an International kindergarten as a Chinese teacher.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like? Can you describe what Hong Kong looks like?**

Hong Kong look like busy place, like everybody walk very fast, running on the street, and even you’re in the MTR, everybody just like so busy, and need as soon as possible to go there!

**How would you describe Hong Kong culture?**

Hong Kong culture, I guess, is easily… is easily to… is easily to the other people to adapt to Hong Kong culture, because a lot of different country people live in Hong Kong, like white people, black people, Asia people, Japanese people. Everybody live together. Yeah, everybody can like take care of each other. Yeah, I think so.

**What’s the political atmosphere like?**

Ahh, okay, a bit bad. A bit bad because sometimes I think the government cannot help the lower salary people. A lot of things they step-by-step to organise, so, if you really need help maybe, not as soon as possible they can help you. For example, now you need the money, now you have no food, now you have no housing to live, maybe you need over three months to apply to get, and then maybe in this period you will feel very hard and work hard.

**Okay, so what’s your relationship to Hong Kong? Were you born here?**

Ah, I born here. I love Hong Kong. Some of the people feel bad and they hate about the weather because humid. Okay? I born in Hong Kong. I love Hong Kong, because my mother and daddy and my family all guys live in Hong Kong, and we are very good communicate with each other; if you need help, I can help you at once. If you like live… Even I’m not rich… If you need money, maybe, I try my best to help you. So, I like Hong Kong.

**So, what are your main values? What’s most important to you?**

My family. My family and my healthy. If I lost this all, maybe I no life. More important than the money, I think so. Maybe I will change the job, because relaxing! Because my boy and girl, they are grow up, I can, you know, spend more time in my work. I try to looking for a new job. Because my daughter, she is in the good secondary school now so I can, like, no need spend too much time with her. And I’m very lucky, my husband and mummy and daddy support me.

**How do you feel about Hong Kong’s future?**

Hong Kong future [long pause] confusing. Why I say that? Because, you know, this year the first year to change about the government. Everybody right? So, everything they are start to setting out. So, I don’t know about the future. Maybe we’ll see what will happen.

**And what about Hong Kong’s past?**

I guess maybe getting better, because the last chief is so rude and too mean. Yeah? You see the Hong Kong TV right? So hopefully, this year, or the coming five year, something change.

**Part 2**

**What’s Hong Kong’s attitude in general towards learning English?**

For me, I’m easy because all my co-worker is Western. I know some of people, maybe some, for the taxi driver, they are no… you know? Cannot any practise time.

**Can you describe your experiences of Western tutors, good or bad?**

Good because only one guy, he left me bad image, but in my memory all guys is very nice and, you know, nice heart and very nice to me. They are kind for me. They always teach me English, practise a lot.

**So, what about the bad experience then?**

Honestly, I don’t like they drink too much, because I know they drink the first drink, they will, you know, the second and third and maybe later they will very crazy.

**Have you sent your kids to an international school?**

If I have money I will, but at this moment they got a good school. So, maybe no.

**So, when we talk about ‘the West’ what do you think ‘the West’ means? What are we referring to when we say, ‘the West’?**

‘West’ means interesting, because a lot of friends. I don’t know! A lot of migrant, I don’t know what are they thinking, because I am Chinese minded. Like, for example, like okay, maybe I’m mad mood, I go for dancing or like a drink, I want to drink by myself, but maybe my friends, Western co-teacher, they like maybe a group together, like a party outside.

**End of interview**

**Harriet Transcript**

Bio: Harriet is a kindergarten teacher in a Hong Kong ‘local’ school. She has two sons. The eldest completed his kindergarten education in an International School, where English was the first language. The youngest spent only his pre-kindergarten year in the International school. Both children now attend local school.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like?**

With a mix of Chinese and Western culture. We can meet many different people here. It is at a good location with many commercial, economic activities, and actually has a good support from China.

**So, how would you describe Hong Kong culture?**

That’s really special. In Hong Kong, I think the Hong Kong culture is very unique, but, if we can say any specific one, I can’t tell you because it’s been affected by many different things.

**Okay, and what’s the political atmosphere like in Hong Kong?**

Getting worse, I guess. I really don’t like the argument amount people, because they would like to… I’m not sure what there is really about politics or not, but somehow they starting from politics. People like to comment on the others for their own point of view, and then they start commenting on anything else with their own stance, which they have already forgotten what is the true moral. Like they can dislike a person to a point that they can say some really bad things. I’m not sure whether you heard about the news that the- how should I put it?- the one woman working in the education bureau, her son committed suicide because of depression, but because that woman had work in… people will think that she is working for China that she is promoting many policies that are relation to national education. So, those people who don’t like her will say really terrible things. That’s the news, like that, really heartbreaking stories from the education and university. They post it on the board saying congratulations to her so they have already lost their… they’re not really… They try to split people into parties even more.

**And what’s your relationship to Hong Kong?**

I born in Hong Kong, so I must stay in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is my home anyway.

**And would you say your main values are? What is most important to you?**

At this moment, family- but that’s not a kind of value right? My children.

**What does Hong Kong’s future look like?**

We can’t deny Hong Kong is part of China, but someone should have to deal with the conflicts. The conflicts is really horrible. I’m not sure what is the culture. It’s also part of the culture from the social media. They can just say something that they don’t have to be responsible for.

**And do you think that conflict will be resolved in the future or get worse?**

At this moment, I can’t see it getting better.

**Okay. When you think of Hong Kong’s past what do you think of?**

It’s quite strange for Hong Kong people to prefer some of those- especially for the teenagers- they prefer to be a colony of UK right? Yeah, they prefer holding the flag of the old one, but, really, we are Chinese, so it’s very contradicting. It’s very hard questions.

**Part 2**

**What is Hong Kong’s attitude in general towards learning English?**

In Hong Kong, still there’s a preference for the parents to apply for those schools that the English medium instructions. I am working in one of those.

**So, you work in an international school?**

No, this is a local school. But honestly the English slide in general.

**Do that think that is a conscious, deliberate thing?**

Hmm, because there is a need for them to learn Chinese. They need to learn Chinese and especially Putonghua, and, because of the system in Hong Kong, so the EMI [English as the Medium of Instruction] schools become like Band 1 or the higher standard. So, the majority of schools are for Chinese medium.

**You said there is still some interest in learning English?**

Still, like many parents would prefer international school, as you have mentioned, because, with the conflicts that I have mentioned, they would like to send their children overseas for their studies. And the other point, maybe, they would like to take the IB. Yes, because of the system, that IB will have more development. So, this is another choice for them, but they have to pay more, in terms of money, for studying English.

**So, what have been your experiences with international schools, good or bad? I know [your children] went to one.**

International school- the environment quite different with local schools, not only the language environment but also the activity approach. I think the international school is more student oriented, because in the local school they still have to attain a certain standard- TSA: Territory wide assessment. That is the basic competency for all the schools. At Primary 3, they have to take an assessment for Primary 6. That is another conflict that the society and the parents they complain about: why they have to drill? The complaint is that it is too demanding for the little children, but I guess maybe that is the system to make better. Can have a better grasp of how well they are teaching and learning. They have to assess anyway to see whether they can meet the standard.

**So, a local school is more oriented towards that exam?**

Yes. You can say so because in these tests they have to…The students will be allocated to a secondary school according to the results, and this is another the parents will feel that they’re quite stressed. Oh, some parents have told me if they entered their children into the international school they can’t return, with that demanding work in local school, that atmosphere with that drill and training.

**And is that a good thing or not?**

You will have to see how the parents, what they hope for. If my children can deal with the work in local school, I think its fine. Also, I think it’s little bit competitive in this environment.

**So how do you think going to an international school affected [your children]?**

My youngest, is very difficult to adapt in the first few weeks from an international school to a traditional kindergarten. It is also an English medium of Instruction school, but he has to walk properly, cannot run. He has to sit still, cannot move. Woah!

**So, local school gave him more structure?**

Yes, and I think children learn English faster than they learn Chinese and the letters, writing, compared with writing the Chinese characters. [My child] want to play everyday. He just draws the characters. [My eldest] is okay; he can adapt.

**So, what were the main reasons you sent them to an international school to start with?**

Happy. Just because at that age they need to go to a school so they are just little boys. So, as we talk in Cantonese at home, so he can speak and listen in English at school or both. Just like and then have more chances to speak in English.

**Okay. Sometimes people say that Hong Kong is quite a ‘Western’ place. What does ‘Western’ mean?**

Should it be something left behind from being the colony of Britain? Hmm, more open-minded. Manners, I guess. Difficult to tell the difference.

We go back more and more. Hong Kong people, I guess, they start to be influenced by China. Yes, how they act, how they behave, which I don’t like. One day, Hong Kong will be like another city, like Shenzhen, just because, really, it’s just one of the cities.

**Is there anything else that you think is relevant to a discussion about the Hong Kong identity?**

Being Hong Kong, I really can’t tell you how special Hong Kong is.

**Can you think of anything that is unique to Hong Kong?**

So difficult. Really, no. Western? Has been Western before, but gradually being more influenced by China. Then will become one of the cities of China. A little passive to say so. Some will not be.

**The Umbrella protesters? Did you support them?**

I didn’t join the protest. At that time, I have been to a course about the human rights. I feel surprized because - it’s organised by the EDB (Education Bureau), it’s talking about more rights of education - its talking about human should have to right to just to speak out. But I supported them, but some of the representative are becoming, at that moment, [hand gesture signalling aggression], but I really supported them. Quite upset that I support them, they put in jail. It’s really upsetting.

**I know some business owners in Mong Kok were opposed to the protests…**

Yes, but protests happen in every country. It’s not an unusual thing. People try to use some not very good reasons to arrest them now.

**Isabelle Transcript**

Bio: Isabelle has lived all her life in Hong Kong and has two children who attend local primary and secondary schools. I used to privately tutor her eldest daughter.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like?**

It is a beautiful city with a lot more to be explored. It is also a busy city. Also, in the very city part, are always crowed with people, noisy, but in the more countryside it’s still the air is quite ‘fresh-y’ and there are a lot of beautiful views.

**How would you describe Hong Kong culture?**

It is actually a multicultural, because you know one hundred years ago, because of the war, so you know it belongs to British colony- my best language about that! So, that’s why the Hong Kong people are. They got a lot of Chinese to contact with people of different cultures. The Hong Kong people are quite hard working and fast. They quite open-minded.

**So, what’s the political atmosphere like in Hong Kong?**

A bit different compared with maybe ten, twenty years ago. It is still democratic, but I think it’s less open than before. It depends on which level you are looking at. If you are very, say, ordinary people, just like the majority, just working, you don’t feel a big difference, because the policy of government is almost the same: protect the people with laws and order are quite well formed. For middle class, or higher class, feel a little bit difference. The way government planning the policy maybe not that democratic anymore, a bit restrictive, but not that bad.

**So, what’s your relationship to Hong Kong? Were you born here? And how do you feel you fit in Hong Kong?**

Yes, I born here and good! I still love to live in Hong Kong, and I guess I will stay here when I am old. I have no intention to leave Hong Kong.

**What are your main values? What are the things that are most important to you?**

To me, in Hong Kong, - how to describe them- a good economy and people’s hearts. I guess, the personality of the whole Hong Kong people; the passion, the hardworking, fast thinking.

**How do you feel about Hong Kong’s future?**

Future… I think more or less- how do I say- going to be stable, because it’s a well-developed city. So, won’t expect a very big change as a city, and I’m still, I think, I’m quite optimistic for Hong Kong’s future. Although it’s well-developed, I don’t see much development. I don’t know. So many the people at that time may not be that happy. I don’t know. Yeah, I think it’s because like is quite easy, but most of the time it will be quite stable anyway.

**And how do you think of Hong Kong’s past?**

With a lot of challenge. And people were happier to face the challenges and try to deal with that, but maybe now they have so… The city is quite well developed, and people didn’t want to work very hard anymore. I don’t know why. Yes, maybe they don’t need to fight for the resources, because their life is already good.

**Part 2**

**What’s Hong Kong’s attitude in general toward learning English?**

Eager, I can say, because we’re all think that English is very important in communication, so in our study and work, because it’s an international city. You can’t just speak your mother tongue. Yeah, people don’t know much about Chinese language or Cantonese, not in Hong Kong. So, English is very important.

**And where has that attitude come from?**

Family and parents. They always stress that you must learn English, because, no English: no study, no good marking. Okay, so you have to study hard and most of the jobs not requires high standard of English. So, that’s why from many years ago we have this concept. And, also, the school teachers.

**How would you describe your own experiences with Western tutors, good or bad, or those of people that you know?**

It’s always good, because, I think, because all my tutors are not from Hong Kong, they’re from UK or… most teachers are from UK really and are experienced, open minded. So, they actually can create interesting learning environment. So, I am really happy with my tutors.

**So how do you think having a Western tutor has impacted your child?**

Definitely helpful: in a way of thinking, in a way of learning English. If I just ask help from a local teacher, probably the way of teaching, the line of thinking, will be local. Most is by memorising things, not that flexible. So, a western teacher can actually- your mother tongue - actually fluent and sometimes not that formal, but sometimes it’s very standard, and I’m actually not that worried my girl can learn anything odd! It’s really, really good.

**What were your reasons behind choosing local schools as oppose to an international school for your child?**

Most important is the school fee, and then the requirement to university is based on the local examinations. They admit the students about 75%. From overseas or international school, only 25%. But, of course, if you let your girl to study in international school, you expecting to send her abroad, but if in local school at least I have a choice.

**We’ve used a phrase a couple of times, ‘the West’ or ‘a Westerner’, what does the term mean to you?**

It’s just west to our country, the culture and the style. The way you are looking, your clothing, the language you use, the things you buy, the things you use, quite a lot not from local but import from overseas. We got a lot of chance to see things overseas, many things without restrictions. So, we don’t need to worry. I can use Yahoo or Google to do my search. In some countries, it is restricted, so, yes, restricted to see other countries.

**Is there anything else that might be important for talking about what Hong Kong is, or a Hong Kong identity?**

Even though I write things, for example, when I take a flight, when I write down my country, I always use my ‘Hong Kong’. Just like Japan: when people go to Tokyo, so they just write Tokyo, instead of just Japan. So, it is an internationally known city, Hong Kong, but if I just say China, it will be too broad, people will not define where Hong Kong is, but, now, if I just say ‘Hong Kong’, then they know it’s Hong Kong.

**Do you find much difference between China and Hong Kong?**

Quite a lot of difference. I think Hong Kong is a very smart city, developed, and China is developing. Yes, the city, they are competitive- Shanghai and Beijing- but Hong Kong has a longer history. And people actually, even though we got the same hardware. The IT skills, customer service, almost the same now. They are catching up fast, but still inside our style of presentation, our style of meeting people. So, Hong Kong has its own style, internationally, but if you go back to Shanghai, you see even the people wearing the same clothes, even people are eating or talking even better English than I, you can still see the style is a bit different. I just don’t know why. It’s just a kind of feeling. Yeah, I thought it was us who can know very clearly. I don’t know you can!

Recently, a bit different, because the clothes they wearing quite, you know, Western, but I can tell from their style of walking, their gesture, without speaking - from china, from mainland China.

So, it is still a good city!

**End of interview**

**Joshua Transcript**

Bio: In 2013, Joshua emigrated from Australia to live in Hong Kong with his wife, who grew up in the New Territories. They are now raising their child in Hong Kong, but they are yet to decide whether to send him to a local or international school when he is old enough. Joshua works as an English teacher and has recently changed from teaching in an International kindergarten to in a local school.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like?**

Mostly, to me, very steep hills. Where I come from, in Australia, is mostly flat. We do have quite a few hills in the East-side of Melbourne, where I live, but they’re not steep like they are here. It feels like a whole bunch of jagged teeth sticking up out of the sea. There’s large stretches where there is a lot of flat terrain and that’s mostly where people have built their cities and towns, villages, that sort of thing. I know a lot of it has been reclaimed from the ocean, around the waterfront. The harbour is mostly reclaimed - flat of course.

**So how would you describe Hong Kong culture?**

Well, just to be clear, I spend the majority of my time in Tai Po, in the New Territories. Sometimes, I work down in Kowloon, but I don’t spend much time down there apart from that. And I think the culture up here is different from what it is on the island and Central and that sort of thing. I think that Hong Kong is largely a melting pot of cultures, and there is still a very significant effect of British colonisation. One of the things that I feel quite weird about is what a lot of people refer to as ‘gweilo privilege’. A white male, like me, can get anything he wants in a restaurant, whereas my wife [who is from Hong Kong], if she goes to a restaurant by herself and asks for something, it’s unlikely she’s going to get it if it’s an extra request sort of thing. So, she’ll always ask me to ask for things like that, and I think that’s one real cultural oddity, because I think of it as, like, reverse racism, because most countries I’ve been to, where I have experienced racism, it’s usually been people of that town disliking someone who’s coming in, whereas, here, it seems quite the opposite.

As for the culture, there’s seemingly a real clash - sorry, ‘clash’ is not the right word - a real meeting point between the old traditions and modern thinking. Just down the corner, here, you’ve got the temple sitting right outside a pub, and I know that wouldn’t have happened some years ago. I still find it funny when you see people burning great big wads of paper in the streets, around the festivals, that type of thing, and I don’t know anyone our age who does that but, certainly, most of their parents do. So, that’s it’s really. It feels like so many places at the moment. It’s in transition into modern thinking, I suppose.

**What’s your relationship to Hong Kong?**

Well, I came to Hong Kong for love, and I fell in love with Hong Kong. So, I… there’s only one thing I don’t like about Hong Kong and that is the humidity. So, if you could bring down the humidity in the summer it would be heaven. My relationship with Hong Kong is a… I don’t speak the local language. I’ve learnt a few phrases. I haven’t made significant effort to learn more, but I don’t need to. Now, I know that’s sort of arrogant to say so, but I’ve got more than enough going on on my plate at the moment, learning how to be a father and a husband and a teacher all at once, and a student again. Certainly, up here, in Tai Po, there’s a lot less English speakers than there are down in central, that sort of thing, and I guess I kind of like that. It feels like it’s more natural Hong Kong. And for the first year or so that I lived here, I think I saw one or two other white westerners in Tai Po. Whereas, now, I see at least one a day, usually more.

**How long have you lived here?**

Three and a half years. And my relationship with Hong Kong- yeah, I love it. I don’t really want to go back to Australia. I do of course, I want to see my family, and Australia will always be my home, but certainly Hong Kong has become my home as well.

**What are your main values? What’s most important to you?**

Family, loyal friends, the truth, and hope- hope for a future, a better future.

**So how do you feel about Hong Kong’s future?**

It’s a very interesting subject, which I’ve discussed many times over many beers with many friends, because I know that the majority of the people of Hong Kong would like to see Hong Kong independent of China. I don’t think that’s ever going to happen. I don’t think it’s going to happen in my lifetime, because, if it did happen, then Hong Kong wouldn’t really survive for very long, because they depend on China for so much. Apart from that, China could just come in and invade it, and in one afternoon it would be Chinese again. So, the future of Hong Kong is in the hands of the youth of today, and you could say that about any place, but you can see things such as the occupy central movement- clear evidence that the younger generation are tired of old politics- and I think that, within the next generation, we’re going to start seeing a real shift towards, not independence, but certainly… I think China’s going to change a lot as well, I think. China - because it’s becoming more and more capitalist now - I don’t think China will ever become a democracy, but it will certainly start to fit in more with Western ideologies.

**So how do you think of Hong Kong’s past?**

If I think of the past, as in the British colonial era, I think it helped Hong Kong and therefore China to develop on the world market. I think it became a real gateway for trade from China and I think that’s helped Hong Kong immensely. I probably wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for that, because probably people in Hong Kong wouldn’t be able to speak English, and [my wife] and I probably never would have met.

Thinking back before colonial rule- I’d love to have seen what Hong Kong what like back then. I’ve been to the museum and I’ve seen lots of things there, but, anytime I see old photos of anywhere, I really want to know what that was like before I was born sort of thing. So yeah, curious.

**Part 2**

**What would you say Hong Kong’s attitude is in general towards learning English?**

I think most people want to learn English and want their children to learn English. Most people here have learned English that are of our generation will say that they can’t speak English, and they speak it better than I can sometimes! Yeah, a lot of people want to learn English and want their children to learn English, because they know that is the best bridge to success for their future. I think more people are going to start to learn Mandarin, as well, because I think China is going to become the next superpower sometime in the next twenty of thirty years, and certainly for the people of Hong Kong working opportunities in the mainland will be beneficial. As for English, yeah, I just see that everybody wants their children to learn it. One of the reason’s I feel fairly secure in my job is that I could lose it at any day and then go and stand outside the local kindergarten for an afternoon and find a full time job tutoring children so… yeah, I‘ve had lots of offers, people asking me to tutor their kids and that sort of thing so, yeah. At the kindergarten where I work at the moment, everybody in the school knows me and, even if I’ve never met them, they’re like, ‘oh, Mr Steve! We must go and say ‘hello’ to Mr Steve!’ All the Children are forced to come and talk to me.

**Are you the only Western teacher in your school?**

I’m not the only Western teacher. For the last two years there was another Western teacher from Canada, but she is half-Taiwanese and half-Macanese, so she looks very Asian. So, yes, I was the old person, who was six-foot-tall with blonde hair, who they wanted their kid to spend time with. Now, we have two other western teachers. One is half Japanese. She looks a little bit Asian. The other one is a New Zealand girl, 25 years old. She’s still sort of finding her groove there at the moment. Yeah, everyone wants their kids to be popular or be well known by the English teachers, then they’ll get special attention. Good luck to them for that.

**So, your own experience then with Western tutors, good or bad, or the experiences of anyone you know?**

I don’t really have enough experience with other teachers to say. A lot of my friends are teachers, but they are all high school teachers working up near the Chinese border and I know for a fact that they’re great teachers. They’re great people. They’re very passionate about what they do. They work at an excellent school. Other tutors- I haven’t met very many, or, if I have, I haven’t experienced their work or what they do. So, I can’t really give you any form of an opinion on that.

**So, you were saying earlier that your son will be taught in an international school?**

Don’t know. I think that while [he] is in Hong Kong, certainly his first language will be Guandonghua, Cantonese. And I would like him to study Guandonghua and Putonghua while he is here, because when we move back to Australia, when he is about five years of age he’s going to be surrounded just in English, and he’s going to have plenty of English at home with myself, and [my wife] also speaks English with him, as well and Cantonese sometimes, and I would like him to focus on learning the local language whilst he is here before we move back, but we’re sort of undecided yet whether that means he will do it in an international school or a local school. If he has an international school, he’s probably still going to speak mostly Cantonese. I’d be more than happy I think for him to go to a local school. It’s something that’s up in the air at the moment.

**So, a few times we’ve mentioned ‘the West’, what is your understanding of ‘the West’- what does it mean?**

When I speak of the West, I usually am referring to the white countries, for want of a better terminology. Western Europe, America, Australia, of course, being my own country. Yeah, pretty much. Though in that I also include most places that aren’t Asia or Africa. So, I’d still consider the South America’s to be ‘the West’.

**End of interview**

**Karen Transcript**

Bio: Karen is the Student Outreach Manager at a Russel Group university in England. She visited her daughter in Hong Kong’s New Territories, where she was working as an English teacher in a private ‘International’ School an English tutor in the evenings. During the visit, together they visited Negros, in the Philippines, before returning to Hong Kong.

**Part 1**

**What is your relationship to Hong Kong?**

My daughter was working in Hong Kong as a teacher and I had the opportunity to go out to Hong Kong for a visit for three weeks to tour around a little bit, sample the work that she was doing, and it was basically a holiday.

**How would you describe Hong Kong culture at the moment?**

Bizarre, and I've got conflicting ideas about what I saw. I was really quite scared about going, because I really didn't know what to expect. I've met lots of people from lots of students from Hong Kong and China through my work. Some of it has always been a little bit of a mystery- about what's going on behind the culture. I've never really experienced the culture in a scenario where I'm actually there experiencing it. It's always been my perception of Chinese people in a UK environment, in Chinese restaurants and that sort of thing, where people are always lovely and pleasant, and so I really didn't know what to expect at all.

So, there were a few things that struck me: old people, the old people really stuck in my mind. While my daughter was teaching in class, I sat in these gardens and watched old people exercising in public and taking the time to mix together. It struck me that they were really kind of relaxed, and I sat on this bench, peeling an orange, and an old lady sat beside me and I offered her some, and she was just so pleasant and happy that I'd offered her this orange. But there was a pride: a pride, and a cleanliness, and a smartness that I saw around these old people that... A youthful old person: that's kind of the perception that I got, that they had their own community. Everyone I spoke to in the shops was really helpful and then, when we went to the jade markets, I wasn't sure whether that was a genuine helpfulness or it was: 'I need to sell my wares', sort of thing. So, there were some conflicts in what I saw in a natural environment to what I saw amongst people.

**So, what is it that makes Hong Kong different from anywhere else or different from your home country?**

Traditions. There seems to be an awful lot of value, genuine value, around traditions. So, when we visited temples, for instance, a lot of respect and a lot of importance placed on those particular special places. If you compare it to the UK, we've got beautiful cathedrals and churches where, if you're a church goer, you're part of that community, but in Hong Kong there seemed to be an openness where anybody can be a part of that community and that participation was valued. So, when we went to the Wishing Tree for instance, even though we were tourists, the people that were running the event, if you like, or organizing, were really keen for you to understand what is was all about, and it didn't matter that you weren't Chinese, that you weren't from Hong Kong, they wanted you to fully participate and get the best out of what you were experiencing. So, the traditions and the fact that the traditions or the festivals or whatever it was at the time - it was New Year - so the New Year traditions were everywhere. So, in little places, where you wouldn't expect it, there were little alters that had been put up that people were obviously respecting. So, in the middle of a vast complex of high-rise buildings, you'd have these beautiful little places to worship that were respected. So, it was everywhere rather than just in designated zones and I just loved that, I thought it was... the inclusiveness that everybody was kind of equal. That was the feeling I got while I was there.

**What do you think the political atmosphere was like in Hong Kong?**

I don't think I ever experienced it. I know that my daughter went to the riots and it was... we viewed that from a UK perspective looking in at what was happening, in snippets on the news. It was about the protests and a lot of young people sort of sleeping-in at places. There was an edge, I think, or it felt like there was an undercurrent there. There could be violence. There could be a lot of resistance by police forces or the government or whatever, so there was that kind of threat there. We perceived there was a threat to the people making the protests that could have got to a level beyond what we would have seen in the UK. So, the use of tear gas and that sort of thing. So, there was the worry. I wasn't worried about [my daughter], because I knew that she was there and that she would look after herself, but looking in it looked like it could be quite a threatening situation, and when you see what... I remember watching Tiananmen Square and how the tanks just trawled through all those people. That wouldn't happen in the UK. So, there was that kind of oppression. You could feel the oppression that was coming from the government, I think, but that was, I didn't feel that at all while I was there. So that's only from the Western media.

**How do you feel Hong Kong might change or stay the same in the future?**

There's a lot of poverty, on a vast scale, I would say. And that's whether… When you think about the flats that have just burnt in London, the Grenfell Tower, and you look at where people live in Hong Kong, they are so tightly packed into that place, that it would need an awful lot of wealth and a breaking down of barriers, I think, to try and address that social situation. So, again I didn't see it an awful lot, so I would imagine that on the outskirts of Hong Kong there is a lot of affluence, but I thought a much clearer divide between the social classes, because it was so tightly packed, frighteningly so.

**And then Hong Kong’s past…?**

I'm not much of a historian. So, thinking what I know about China and the oppression there, and through seeing the visitors from China, from mainland, within Hong Kong while I was there, they appear to be quite a different sort of person. I'm not explaining myself very well here. There was an aloofness from the Chinese people that we saw, and I don't know whether that's simply because they haven't been exposed to as many different cultures. So they seemed to be very self-contained and almost looking down on the people who were living in Hong Kong. I think there was a marked different between the Chinese people we saw and the people who lived in Hong Kong. Does that answer your question?

**Yes. Where does Hong Kong fit globally? How international is Hong Kong?**

Because of the density of the population that I saw in the places we were at, it is its own culture with its own ways. They're seeing Westernisation through tourism and through big corporations that are in there, but I don't think that even with that there has been much exposure to the Western world. Shopping malls, for instance, seemed almost bizarre. So, if you walked into a shopping mall within Hong Kong it was almost very Westernised, but the minute you stepped out of it you were back into the chaos and the density that is Hong Kong. That Westernisation hadn't spread out beyond those retail outlets. So, everywhere else you went out in Hong Kong it was very Chinese. The Western influence you could see in places like Apple. So, you've got these big corporate buildings that just seem to be little islands amongst what was Hong Kong. Whereas other countries I've been to that's more interspersed into communities. Hong Kong was very intense and very closed in, I think.

I haven't been to China but I've seen it... the personalities are different. They're much more reserved. I can see that in students who come [to England], I can tell, now, which people are from mainland China and which people are from Hong Kong, and that's in things like when you're passing them in the lift for instance, people from Hong Kong will smile and say 'hello' whereas Chinese people are very reserved, and I don't know whether that is because people from Hong Kong have had more opportunity to be exposed to people from the West or whether it’s just simply that it's a cultural thing. It's inbuilt because of the way that they're brought up. I don't know, but I can now tell. Whereas, I couldn't before I went to Hong Kong.

**So, you used a phrase earlier, 'the West' or 'Western world'. What is your understanding of ‘the West’; where does ‘the West’ refer to, and what does it mean?**

Okay, in its loosest sense, Europe, and America, Canada. Even though it's not West, that's what I would see. White culture, if you like, I suppose, if we're looking at ethnicities, where business, commerce, social media, to a certain extent, I think. That kind of globalisation. That's what I would think of “the West”: place and culture, definitely, and race.

‘The West’ is an addition to Hong Kong’s base- this base that's historic, set in religious festivals, this chaotic norm. That's how I think of Hong Kong; a chaotic norm. And then you've got these little bits of other influences that haven't quite gelled, and it will take a long time for Hong Kong, if it ever would, to become Westernised, in my mind, because there are so many people with so many traditions, so many old people, such a lot of history runs through what happens in Hong Kong.

**Part 2**

**Beyond just learning English as a language, do you see any other value that an English tutor might have for a Hong Kong child?**

Yes, from what I saw, and from what I've seen in the media, from what I've seen in documentaries, and from my own experience working in education, there is so much value placed on education within the Hong Kong system and in the Chinese system, and the Japanese system, that students or young children, I think, almost become regimented. So. I didn't feel, from what I've seen, that there's not an awful lot of time and capacity for those children to develop as individual people. It's very regimented. So, what I saw when I visited the school in Fanling, where there were UK tutors, was that gentleness, where the tutors respected the children for being individuals. So, it wasn't... It was all about education. It was very much all about education, but I thought the UK tutors took time to identify the children as individuals and work with those children's personalities within the constraints and times they'd got to do.

So one of the things that struck me was seeing the little children, two-and-a-half, three-year-olds, coming in with their parents in perfect uniforms, perfectly well-behaved, being able to sit down at a table at that age, take off their own bags, in their own draws, get out their own alphabetical books, open them to a page that the tutor's asked them to open to, I was amazed by that almost robotic action of the children. Even at that age, the children appreciated that they were in a learning environment and they were there to study. Even at three-years-old, and I couldn't get my head around it, and I still can't. Rather than learning and developing as people. And one of the things that struck me, and I still think about it now, and I still recall the situation was in the time that they were designated to play in the afternoon, the children walked in a beautiful little line, singing a song, up to the play area, where they were told to go and find toys to play with and to enjoy themselves and there was a car that the children could sit in a drive in and, if I compared it to a UK nursery, you'd have half a dozen children running up to the car all fighting to get in, there'd be tears and whatever because only one child had made it in. In that play environment, the children went to the car, one child got in, the others turned away, really well-behaved, and went to other activities, and it was like bizarre behaviour.

It was bizarre that within the school environment that I saw, that the teachers line up, that the Western teachers were asked to line up to meet parents as they came through the door, and I think it was almost as if the teachers were revered. They were held in very high esteem by the Hong Kong nationals, but image was very important to the teachers and to what I felt the school was trying to portray. So, because I wasn't an official member of the school, I was asked to stay out of the way when teachers were around, which again was quite bizarre. I'm a respectable person, I think, but I think there was a lot to do with image and the school almost played to the value of having Western teachers. That was just my opinion, I could be wrong, but that was the opinion I got that- almost a bit of a false impression. If you walked into... I think of schools that we go into in the UK. Some of the schools I go into are teaching many different languages. Doesn't matter what nationality comes through the door, they’re all treated the same with the same amount of respect, whereas, it was evident that there was a hell of a lot of value placed on having those Western teachers there. Don't know what they're trying to achieve by that, I really don't. I don't know whether it was them wanting to portray as a global institution of engagement and of learning. Not quite sure what that was all about, but there was obviously from the school's perspective: they were special because they'd got English teachers.

**What was your experience, good or bad, of the international school system in Hong Kong?**

Working in education, I thought it was too narrow, just from what I saw. An excellent environment for children to excel academically, if they're academic children. Some of the children in the class that I saw weren't necessarily academically bright. You could see that. Yet, they were being forced into this particular mould, trying to make them fit a particular mould, when actually, at that stage in their life, I think more social development would have been beneficial for them; so, more play, more play through learning rather than the dictated way that the school wanted children to learn. A very set time-table. Our nursery schools are a little bit different.

But they were creative within a restrictive environment. So, on the walls, for instance, the English teachers had done things like the children had portrayed seasons. I know they were working to quite a strict timetable and they had to be sure that all the children went through the same sort of experience, so that they could be evaluated and measured in a very restrictive regime, a very restrictive framework. I could see that the school was very neat, was very tidy, and that was obviously there, I think, for parents to come in and think, 'wow, this is a good business’. It was almost business-like rather than educational-like, but the Western teachers, the songs that they were singing, they were making them fun, for instance, but they were very conscious also that they had something to deliver within a time frame. But I think there was a lot of attempt, a big attempt there, to be creative within a restrictive environment. It almost felt like teachers were a bit oppressed. They'd got to deliver a certain thing, and, from what I saw, they were doing their best to bring a bit of fun and inspiration for the child to think for themselves not just learn a set thing. That was my impression.

They had a lesson in Mandarin, I think it was, and then that ended, and then they were straight back into something else. There wasn't a flow of, 'let's think about a concept for a morning', or anything. It was very, very… but I think that was because of the constraints of what the school had said she had got to deliver and she'd got windows facing a central office, so it was obvious to me that the teachers were being observed all the time, and I think the teachers would be conscious of that.

**Is there anything else you think might be relevant for a discussion of the Hong Kong identity, or English education?**

The place itself? Is bizarre. In that, it's almost like an ant nest. So, there are roots and there are structures through all these tall tower blocks, and I spent three weeks looking up staring at how high it was, and I've got a picture that represents, in my mind, which is why I wanted to buy the picture when I was in the Chinese market that represents it to a tee, for me. In that all above you: atmosphere, buildings, not when you're out in the place that [my daughter] lived, [Tai Po, New Territories]. Hong Kong itself, central Hong Kong, is grey. Everything is grey, black and white, including the sky, and then at the bottom of it you've got this frantic burst of colour, the paper oranges and paper lanterns, and other than in the shopping malls, you didn't see that colour, other than at low level. So, you know, you walk down a street in Hong Kong where you've got shopping or where we went to the market: vibrant colour and a mass of activity on the bottom, and then you look up and it's just grey, and that will stick with me, and that's why I bought that picture, because that is my perception of Hong Kong, my perspective of Hong Kong. Even when we went to this gorgeous little “antique-y” bit, I bought another picture that was all browns with colours because that was more...- So, I've got two pictures: one that is browny, with a few colours in, and that represents a little bit - maybe I didn't see enough of Hong Kong - and then I've got my biggest picture that is kind of just beyond the harbour, in that greyness. It was bizarre.

I'd love to go back and see more of the waterfronts that we tested a little bit. So, when we walked through this spider alley one day, you know, a beautiful lagoon-type-place. I'd love to see more of that. But it was just a place of such contrasts. Bizarre contrasts. And then you've got this mad snake of a thing, in the MTR, running through the middle of it that doesn't seem to be in the right place. This massive modern thing in all that bizarreness that's Hong Kong. It's the most bizarre, bizarre place to me, and I'd love to do more of the outskirts we sort of tested.

And I think one of the reasons I panicked when we went to the Philippines afterwards was because it had been so busy and so intense, yet I never felt threatened in Hong Kong, I didn't feel threatened at all, and I felt safe. I felt it was busy and it was a hundred mile an hour, but then I'd just got used to that and we went to something totally different, where everybody was laid back and lazy and very, very poor, and it took me a while I think to get my head around it. And we were in the complex in the Philippines, which was very Western, and suddenly I was back in my comfort zone. And give me another week there, and I'd have been ready to go about and explore the Philippines. I just needed a rest after Hong Kong, because it was so mentally and physically bizarre.

**In the Philippines, then, what was it that made you feel- you said you felt threatened?**

I knew nothing about it. I think what made me feel threatened was that it was so poor, so very, very poor, and I didn't know whether we were safe from mugging or... muggings I think really, more than anything. I didn't know whether people were looking at us thinking, 'rich people', and therefore there was a disdain. And the only time we saw that was when we went to this little fruit market briefly, and somebody chuntered at... and we kind of laughed it off, but I didn't know whether I felt threatened. So, it was more understanding what their perception was of Westerners, and I would have probably chilled out to that a little bit more. It's different when you go on a package holiday to a place you've not been before. I mean like Barbados, some of the places I've been to in Barbados, and the Caribbean have been very, very poor, or when I've gone to Tunisia or Morocco it's been very poor, but that's always been on an organised trip through, so there's a safety there. We were two blonde women in the middle of something that I didn't know and didn't understand. So, that's what I found threatening, but I'd love to go back and see it again.

**Anything else?**

Yeah, we spoke about, or I spoke about, different cultures, and that perhaps people in Hong Kong hadn't been exposed to seeing Western tourists. And obviously Western people work there, but one of the things that struck me was almost the treatment of the Filipinos that were working there. Almost verging on modern day slavery, I thought. It was quite bizarre. There was a time when [my daughter] was teaching inside the class and I was sat outside, and there were a group of Filipino nannies, I think, they must have been, sitting sort of outside the view of the school, but they were all sitting together, and I bought some lunch and went to sit down there and one of the ladies asked me what I was doing there. And they were sitting on cardboard, which was quite bizarre in itself. But they were sitting in this little group on cardboard, under the eaves, if you like, of the tower block that was at the side of the building, and they were all sharing lunch and they asked me what I was doing there. So, I got talking to them and they were waiting for the children to come out of the school, but it was almost as if they were kind of a hidden culture. So, when we were talking about exposure to different cultures, if I think about the UK, because we've got so many different cultures now, lots of different immigrants, immigrant groups, lots of different ethnic groups that, okay, to a certain extent, live in certain parts of the city, some bits more than others, but [the Filipino’s] were almost like a little sub-culture that wasn't almost accepted into. They were there to do a job. I think that's how it was: they were there to do a job, but they were always in little groups. So, we walked down through a subway one night, and they were all... They'd all obviously done their day job. They'd gone to meet. They were sitting in these little, like, cardboard-like sectioned-off spaces, almost as if they were there but unseen. So, there wasn't that mixing, social mixing, between the different ethnic groups. That particular group of ethnicity, the Filipinos, there didn't seem to be an acceptance that they were there as people. They were just like a little sub-culture, kind of almost there and ignored, and I found that a bit strange.

You walk down a big street in Sheffield, a big city like Hong Kong, a big road in Sheffield and you've got different outlets selling different sorts of food and you've got different Indian, Chinese, Thai, the whole thing is there, and it's almost accepted that we've got the different culture. Hong Kong is very Hong Kong, Chinese, and I didn't see any other cultural influences. I never saw an Indian restaurant, I don't think or... so it was all very Chinese, and very, ‘that's the way it is’. And then these little groups of these Filipino people that were, I felt, ignored. A bit like modern day slavery to me. That was another concept that I thought was a bit weird and a bit sad. So, when you talk about how long Hong Kong... will we ever see Hong Kong mixing with the Western world? Not until there's more of an ethnic mix.

**And what about the Filipino people that you met in the Philippines?**

Lovely. Very much... I don't think I've ever seen a non-smiley Filipino person. So, they've got very, very little, but they have a way of just being happy, and I think they *are* happy! You see them, and they look happy, when they're with their own people. Very inquisitive, obviously they have a perception of what we call the Western world as being fantastic and almost like paradise, in terms of what we own and what we've got, but yet they've got so little, and they're so happy and so willing to be friendly and be helpful.

But again, because even when I was brave enough to venture outside of the hotel, into the little kind of shanty town that was beside us, I went to buy something, the lady didn't speak English, but she wanted to be helpful, and she wanted to show me what she'd got, and I even ended up taking- whether this is through guilt or… I don't think it was guilt, I was just conscious that she'd got so little, living in a shack, with nothing- I took her a fluffy cardigan for the night time, because they'd got so little. And the way that they were cooking on the street for other people to come up, other people from their little villages to come and, or their little community, to come and share or buy food that sort of thing. Just a feeling that they were... that I was uncomfortable with the stares that we got in the Philippines because we were different.

On the MTR in Hong Kong, you know the staring, but then I found myself staring at some little Chinese kiddies that dressed up for the Hong Kong festival. So, that works both ways doesn't it? You look at what you don't know, you're curious about what you don't know, and as much as you don't want to stare, you can't help yourself but look at something that's different. The Chinese, the mainland Chinese people who approached us in this park one day, almost verging on rudeness, because they were so inquisitive about what we looked like, because they'd not had that exposure. We wouldn't get on a bus and stare at a Chinese person [in the UK], because we're used to seeing that, we're used to seeing Chinese people, we're used to seeing African, American African, whatever, we're used to seeing different cultures. We don't stare because we're used to it, but it just highlighted how in Hong Kong, and the Philippines, there isn't that exposure to different culture in the way that we accept it as everyday life.

**End of interview**

**Louise Transcript**

Bio: Louise is the head teacher of a private international kindergarten. She was born in Hong Kong and has lived there all her life. She is pregnant with her first child.

**Part 1**

**Can you explain- What does Hong Kong look like?**

Popular city. Everybody wants to visit our city, because, I just heard the news today, Hong Kong is one of the most popular cities that the tourist want to come. We are the sixth one. So, I’m quite proud of that.

**And how would you describe Hong Kong culture?**

Sometimes quite traditional, because for this- I am a kindergarten teacher- for the education part, still have some very traditional think, but for the other part, it’s things like coming to upgrade and then more diversity.

**What’s the political atmosphere like?**

From my point of view, I am not satisfied with this government because it’s… have you heard the news in Hong Kong? Some teenagers they were just want to fight for vote for them and then speak out because they want the freedoms. Just want the rights they get it, but the government didn’t listen, they just do what they want from China. So, I don’t think it is a good future for us.

**So what’s your relationship to Hong Kong?**

Ah, I born here. I like so much.

**And what are your main values? What’s most important to you in general?**

I think, you mean family? I think family, because before I get pregnant and before I’m married I think the job is quite important to me, because we live in Hong Kong, we need to have the, keep the, living… have the average salary to live in Hong Kong because, do you know, the rent is very high in Hong Kong, so we are concerned about much in our job, but now I get married and pregnant I focus more on my family.

**How do you feel about Hong Kong’s future? What does Hong Kong’s future look like?**

If we don’t have the government from China, I think it’s good, but now I don’t think so. Little bit disappointed.

**And how do you think of Hong Kong’s past?**

It’s full of poverty, probably, but now it’s not better.

**Part 2**

**What’s Hong Kong’s attitude towards learning English?**

Even the school and the parents want the students to learn more English, so they will put them in just like our international class, our international school, because they want to practice more. But is it good for them? I don’t think so. Yes, because a happy school is very important. It’s not just like let them to copy and writing all the time, because the communication is very good. So, we have employ so many NET teachers here. We want to give the students a happy school memory and then let them to learn in a very leisure time.

**Where do you think this need to learn English has come from?**

Because English is the international language, I think, I agree that it is important, but I am concerned about the approach to learning.

**So- your own experiences employing NET teachers. Can you explain good points and bad points?**

For the good first- they really give a good environment and the atmosphere to the students and they real really- even the students is two years old- they don’t afraid the English. They can communicate quite well, you know, when they graduate in our school. And, also, the NET teacher, I think, the foreign teacher is quite nice, take care of the Chinese one, because maybe your living style or growing style is totally different from our Chinese. So, I’m quite happy with that.

**In what way is it different?**

For example, students always get hurt, here, and our Chinese will very nervous, and will tell parents immediately, even if a little bit red, but for the NET teacher it’s not big deal! Even it’s bleeding- ‘Oh, okay, we will help you to clean up okay, it’s okay.’ So, I’m very happy to have NET teachers of this mind.

Before the bad things- maybe it’s not… it’s our school, I think, maybe they not provide a very good salary or other, for housing for you, and I think as an employer we need we can provide more for you.

**I mean, some of the NET teachers you’ve employed in the past, have you had any bad attitudes from them or things that don’t fit with the school?**

Really, every year we get some, but I can understand. Most of them are first time to come to Hong Kong. They can’t adapt our school or adapt the Hong Kong style in very quick time. But some of them is about the characteristic. Maybe they are not very popular, not social, but we need to let them to live in the same house. So many they will feel very upset or nervous or no one to help them. I think we can provide more help to them.

**When you say they don’t really fit with the school style, they don’t adapt to the school style sometimes, what do you mean by that?**

Because some of them are not qualified professional kindergarten teachers. They are just teaching primary school or elder students so maybe they don’t know what we are like them to do.

**So, will you send your own daughter to an international school?**

Before, I don’t think so, because I want her to learn our basic Chinese, Cantonese first, because Cantonese is quite difficult to learn and I don’t want to let her to learn both English and Cantonese together because it must be mixed up the language. But now, maybe I will try first, because need to think the long way for her primary school, because nowadays in Hong Kong the primary school is very, very hard, and also for the government one, the subsidised one, they have many, many homework. This is not a happy school. But the non-subsidised, the private one is more like our school’s atmosphere. Maybe I want to, I prefer to, give her a try school first because the foundation need to be very good. So, maybe I will send her to study here first, and then go to some private school or international school.

**And then the last question. So sometimes we refer to ‘the West’ or someone being ‘Western’, what does that mean?**

Just like I tell you before I like your Western style because when you born in your country the living style is really different. You don’t have so many rules, no rules, but sometimes you know what to do. Very funny! But for our traditional Chinese, we need to follow the rules. For example, line up, because we need students to line up very straight, but for the Western style: ‘it’s okay, you can walk until the destination then when you reach, that’s okay!’ Doesn’t mind that if it’s straight or not.

**Is there anything else that you think is important when I am talking about Hong Kong or teaching English in Hong Kong?**

Can I talk about parents? Because I think now the parents… the style is really, really change a lot. Before, they will respect our teachers so much, but now they will look like our teaching is a service. I don’t think it’s a good atmosphere for the future and also for the kids, and it means our students they will look like… look like our teachers like as a provide service.

**The NETs and the local teachers?**

Both. So, because we need to pay a lot, right, you know, the school fee. They think they will give you so much money they need to get a lot back. So, nowadays- when you leave these two, three years- we have many, many complaints, and the complaint is not reasonable. They just want to get the most good things on their own, but they don’t want to think about others. For example, the thing about our school. So, I think it’s not a very good atmosphere for our future parents.

Why? I think sometimes it’s the governments, it’s not stable in Hong Kong, maybe, become not stable but not now. So, they will very nervous and will ‘get more and more for myself’. So, they will look like others, just same point of view.

**End of interview**

**Meghan Transcript**

Bio: Meghan was born in Hong Kong and is a recent graduate of City University, Hong Kong. She was heavily involved in the 2014 Umbrella Movement, and her friends now face the prospect of unemployment and even jail time for their participation in the protests.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like?**

Internationally, it is a robusting city in the world, and also it is very, everything is fast, and then just it is about working and business. Everything from modern city.

**What’s Hong Kong culture?**

A mix of Western and Eastern culture, and then I think there is not enough about the identity of Hong Kong because Hong Kong culture… What do I think about Hong Kong culture?

**What makes Hong Kong special as a place?**

Not special. Just it’s very modern city and everyone works very effectively and just everything go very fast. Yeah, and for the Hong Kong culture, maybe you can find some in Hong Kong Island or somewhere in the New Territories, but it changes a lot so I can hardly find anything about Hong Kong culture now.

**And what is the political atmosphere like in Hong Kong?**

I think it’s try to be more democracy. Everyone is try to fight for their democracy against the Chinese monitoring government. And for the political atmosphere, I think the young generation are facing the pressure from the government and they want to fight for their freedom and… but there are a lot of obstacles on this path, like the penalty. One month before, about the Umbrella Revolutions, three youngsters are sentenced and some are my friends. I just feel very depressed about this because every one of us have not ever, have never imagined about sent to jail for some of for thirteen months. That is really, really heavy penalty, and I’m so frustrated about this.

**Is that for protesting?**

Protesting. And what they are, we are, protesting is for the freedom for the living of the public, especially the minority. And so, about the atmosphere, I think everyone are depressed because we are fighting for the justice. And then, for what we are fighting for, you may feel tired anymore that we have to keep continue about this fight because we have seen it, we have to do something to change where we are living.

**What about the older generation, older than your perspective?**

Yeah, they’re dividing the two parties. Yeah, for some they… yeah, I know some of them are the older people are very supportive about what we are doing, but for many of them maybe just think we are very aggressive, and some think that we are very free to doing it, or maybe we are very lucky, and that we can get whatever we want. Yes, because we can get a job from the government and get educated easily and earn money easily at our age, and then so they may feel that we are just have too much freedom in doing this.

**What’s your relationship to Hong Kong?**

I am twenty-five-years old, I live here for twenty five years.

**What does Hong Kong’s future look like?**

I think the Hong Kong future, the ‘combativity’ of Hong Kong is regressing globally, because it cannot… There’s no hope for the development for this, because it’s too difficult to ensure. And for the future about the creative industry, creative technology and that- those, I don’t think the government is supporting the new generation develop this aspect, because we, Hong Kong, is more focussed on the financial development, and then they are ignore the living of general public. So, for the future, I think they just keep trying to boost the financial centre, rather than more focus on the other parts so that they can still keep their stages, ranking.

**And when you think of Hong Kong’s past, what do you think of?**

Past? I notice when I was young, I just know that Hong Kong is a part of China. So… because when I grow up I just know… in the past, I think Hong Kong is a very developed city, but… and more focussed on the, for the government, they are more focussed on the living of the people.Everyone in the past, I think… less suicide cases on the news. And then the past…

**How recent past do you mean? 5 years? 10 years?**

10 years. And then, in the past, I am proud to be Hong Kong.

**And what has changed? So, why are you less proud now?**

I think Hong Kong are very selfish. They always charge others, and they are rude, I think.

**Part 2**

**What do you think Hong Kong’s attitude is towards learning English?**

Second language, and then I think it’s from the mandate to the… because, from kindergarten to high school education, English is an important path for our education, and I think general level of English is better than other Asian countries.

**Why do people want to learn English?**

I think why because the education. And maybe, for the second reason, maybe for my generations we must travel very much, and so we have to learn some communication in English, to travel everywhere, and then this is a very crucial language for us to travel.

**Did you have an English teacher?**

NET teacher and Chinese both.

**And how did you feel about that NET teacher?**

Their education method is much more different than the Chinese teacher, because they will teach us vowels and then they will teach through some games, some wordings, or maybe some communication method and just try to correct our poor pronunciation.

**If we talk about ‘the West’, so, if somebody said, ‘Hong Kong is ‘Western’’ or somebody is ‘from ‘the West’’, what does ‘West’ mean to you?**

To me, fast food culture! And then about English and then about… And then about British, yeah, because of the British government.

**If somebody is ‘Western’, what would their attitude or behaviour be like?**

Nothing different. They are, in Hong Kong for the Western, their attitude just the same, yeah, but they in by university they are just be a group of west people.

**Anything else you want to bring up, talk about, to do with Hong Kong?**

Hong Kong, let me think… Hong Kong culture… Hong Kong people, they are trying to be Hong Kong independence from China, but I don’t agree, and maybe they hate Chinese very much, especially that part. I want to be independent, but we cannot separate.

I just want to have less control by the Chinese, especially for the freedom part. For the governing, it should be Hong Kong government, but we can be separate as China, because we still have it to have economic role. That is very true, but about the Hong Kong atmosphere, now they are… we are just trying to fight to have less governing.

**Can I ask you about the Occupy Central protests, were there some local business people who were against the protests?**

Many, yes, but I… it will affect our career. Many business, many company are against for this. When I graduate, I am afraid of can’t finding any job because of my past participation, through the social media, my Facebook page presence, and then I just try to seek a job in from the west.

**So, were you quite central in the protests?**

I just tried to stay there and be protecting my peers. At Admiralty since 28th of September, from the start to the end. Yeah, I just skip all the lessons, and my teachers say, ‘what are you doing there?!’ and I just try to stay in there and have self-study.

**End of interview**

**Nicholas Transcript**

Bio: Nicholas is a recent graduate from Hong Kong University. He was born in Hong Kong but spent several of his childhood years in Canada. He now works in Hong Kong as an English teacher.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like?**

Hong Kong is the breast of a chicken. It lies on the breast of a chicken, geologically. City wise- it’s very colourful, very bright, very busy, very crowded, but then there’s like a lot of different experiences, but very busy.

**How would you describe Hong Kong culture?**

Hong Kong culture. Well, Hong Kong culture is more Cantonese. It’s more of the Canton part of China, because we speak Cantonese instead of Mandarin or Putonghua. So, I think there’s like a different part of Hong Kong which is different from China. I think Hong Kong- well, usually, we say that there’s like an, in Chinese, we have like a Lion’s Rock spirit. That means we have a neighbourhood flavour kind of place. People, they look after each other in Hong Kong. They look after each other. We look after each other’s backs, so it’s a very warm and flavourful place.

**And what’s the political atmosphere like?**

It has changed like throughout the years. So, before, we were colonised by the British, and ever since then- it’s like twenty years ago- we were… actually, we were quite… there were a lot of different opinions when China took back, the handover, and I think for the recent years a lot of people they start to reflect on their identity. Especially on the Hong Kong identity as versus the Chinese identity. So, there’s like a big political opinion going around thinking about like how China is trying to take over Hong Kong and China is trying to implement its idea. Some people might say that ‘brainwashed’. Yeah, so that’s like how the political affects. So, there’s like people going on strikes and a lot of, recently, there’s a lot of teenagers and college students they are going out to the streets because they see these political differences.

**And what’s your relationship to Hong Kong? Were you born here?**

I was born here. I was, in my primary school years, for like six to twelve years old, I was in Canada, but then for the other years of my life I was in Hong Kong.

**And do you think you will stay in Hong Kong?**

It really depends because, like, I have, like, dual citizenship, so it really depends on like is Hong Kong like a safe place. Yeah, if it’s a safe place. Different perspectives: for example, like one is if it is safe; the second is like, because Hong Kong is really busy, sometimes you need to like try to take a break, probably like some go to working holidays, so maybe I might have that approach someday where I like, you know, go to another country to live a while.

**So, what’s most important to you? What are your values?**

My values, I think it’s to be true to myself like not to be too bounded, to do the things that I wanted to do, and that’s mostly it.

**And what do you think Hong Kong’s future looks like?**

That’s quite hard. Future… I think there’s like different perspectives. One of them is like you think Hong Kong is like, since it’s part of China and China’s, like, the main leader, I think Hong Kong has like some things they need to deal with. So, I think, in terms of the future, it might be more related to China, but then I think in another part, since we were talking about the political views, I think there’s still like a lot of hope, because we can see like a lot of people are standing up for themselves. They aren’t going to be, like, put down just because somebody says, ‘you should do this, you should do that’. So, I think there’s, like, hope in Hong Kong. So, I don’t really know the exact future but it’s not too negative, not too pessimistic.

**Part 2**

**What’s Hong Kong’s attitude in general towards learning English?**

I think, even though there’s like a lot of new schemes about how to learn happily or how to learn more, at the end its more about exams, because in different part of a person’s life there’s like a lot of exam related identification, for example, when they, like, go to school, when they go to college, when they get into different kinds of business. So, I think it’s more exam based. So, even though if they try to make it more like, very authentic, very happy, it’s still very bounded by this sad fact.

**So, can you describe your own experiences with NETs?**

I have been with different NET teachers or NETs. Before, I worked in secondary school and you can see like NETs they have… they like to bring ideas from their own countries. Like the one from the old secondary school, he’s from Australia, and he wanted to bring a lot of Australian things like, especially in English week, he likes to introduce like Australian food, Australian accents, and so on, and I think that’s like that’s a benefit of have a NET in schools, because they, for example, a NET in my school, he’s British, and before it’s Indian, so there like a lot of different cultural introductions to students and to the school, so I think that’s good.

But then it’s, in terms of education, they don’t have like a very systematic approach about how, what they’re going to teach, because like they’re not really clear about if they’re teaching grammar or if they’re trying to introduce culture or if they’re trying to introduce phonics or reading skills. So, in terms of the quality, it’s not that stable.

**So, did you go to an international school?**

I didn’t go to an international school but I studied in Canada for six years, so some people might refer that to like an international school experience.

**Okay and how do you think that has impacted you?**

Well, because in Canada the teachers, they are homeroom teachers, they teach most of the subjects, so it’s quite different from Hong Kong where teachers are subject based, so, like, you’re an English teacher or Chinese teacher. So, I think it has its pros and cons. So, like, being a homeroom teacher, you really know your students and you get to grow with them, but then in Hong Kong you get to be really professional with your own field like English and like, ‘I want to introduce like a lot of grammar terms or maybe like cultural related to like English to the students’. So, I think it’s quite different. But then, as a teacher, I really enjoy being a homeroom teacher, because I think as a teacher the most important thing is to grow with the students and to help the students to grow, because I think knowledge is not that permanent but then I think the growing experience, the procedures, how they deal with their primary school life, is more important than learning specific knowledge.

For example like, in our schools- because, in Hong Kong, although you’re like an English teacher or you are subject based, you still have like a main class as a class teacher- and, recently, they try to implement activities or some ideas into how you are going to maintain the class, maintain like the good atmosphere, like the atmosphere of team building as a whole class, so I think growing with the students is like a very important aim for teachers.

**If we talk about ‘the west’ or something being ‘Western’, what does that mean?**

Well, in Hong Kong being Western it means like some new ideas, creative ideas. So, if you say like some food is Western or some person is Western like usually it is quite exotic, it brings like a new spice, culturally or like ‘flavourably’. So, like, I think that’s what Western means in Hong Kong, but, then, to me like Western is mostly geographically, so, like, more European or American. That’s Western to me.

**End of interview**

**Olivia Transcript**

Bio: Olivia, a recent graduate, was born in Hong Kong and now lives with her parents in Kowloon.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like?**

Complicated. Like, Hong Kong is mixed features, mixed style. Actually, I don’t think there is anything that can represent Hong Kong. Everything can, because we got all the things. Actually, you can find Japan things here, you can find many Indian things here, and Thailand things here. Anything you can find, you can find here.

I believe Hong Kong has sight-seeing things, but as people living here, I think there is nothing really for me. I just go to the specific place that I need to go to.

**How would you describe Hong Kong culture?**

Actually, for these few years, I think that Hong Kong is having their own culture because… I don’t think that I can say that. Sometimes, I think, when the government is doing something that is really not supportive of the Hong Kong people, the Hong Kong people is doing something for themselves, because they are gathering together to make the society, their culture, by themselves, because there are so many, they want so many things, and they want it from the government, and the government can’t give them.

**So, what *is* that culture?**

They more like to be sharing also they- and I don’t know if it’s really popular in Hong Kong- but I see some Facebook groups saying that they are going to have a free ride from people from Tai Po to everywhere. The drivers only just maybe help the father in the family, because he has to work outside Kowloon, or he will go from Tai Po to anywhere and he’ll see if anyone can have same road, and they can get a free ride for them. They make those Facebook groups and lots of different ways, because they think that, when they don’t want any stuff, they are going to throw it away, they can ask, and anyone can get it for free. I think that these cultures are common in these years but not in the previous ones.

**And what is the political atmosphere like?**

That’s a difficult one! Actually, not really stable, because people are start having… actually when the policy pass, around twenty years ago, people think it’s okay, because when they said anything they just going to believe it, they are going to follow or okay, and there’s very little people will voice out and think that there is something need to change, but, in these few years, I think that Hong Kong people having many different views and they are… they don’t mind to tell anybody, and they start to tell the government that that is not okay, that it’s not okay to only listen to you or just follow what you say, because actually the government stop listening to people. I think that. Because they are… that’s why they will do such things, and that makes this political environment a bit different.

**What’s your relationship to Hong Kong?**

I live here, I work here, and I don’t think I am going to leave here. I’m not going to leave here from any time. I think that it’s not only a place that I am born, actually, it’s a place that I’m going to stay for my whole life.

**What are your main values? What’s most important to you?**

Fair and equal.

**And what does Hong Kong’s future look like?**

Great. So great, because… actually we can’t see in the future, any plans that we… we can’t know. We don’t know about the future. We don’t have a big picture about what will happen, because when, from 1997, we think that there is going to be another fifty years will be the same and everything is remaining unchanged, but for only twenty years about I can see that there is lots of things are changing, and it’s not what Hong Kong would expect.

**So, do you think, after 1997, people thought it would change more or stay the same?**

The government, or, I should say, the high people, said that it’s okay, it’s going to be the same, it’s going to be unchanged, but no! Actually, no! And I don’t know has people told you about the situation that with 1997 lots of people think that the Chinese government is not… you can’t believe them. They go to many different places, maybe Canada, maybe Australia or something like that, and, for around ten or twenty years, China is growing up and they have many people they think they can have many money, many property, and they come back to Hong Kong, but, for people who have live in Hong Kong, and have live here for twenty years, think you can’t stay here anymore, you can’t trust this place, you can’t trust the government.

**So, when you think of Hong Kong’s past?**

How about the Lion Mountain thing? Anyone tell you about that? I think around, at the age of my father’s childhood, they are not sharing really good environment, they are not having, they are not rich, and they have good relationships with neighbours, willing to take care of other’s children, if anyone just leaving about or its okay to eat with them or anything. In the past, I think, maybe Hong Kong is like that. They is okay to share anything, and they will help others, but around I think, at the age of for the adult age, they didn’t do the same things right now. After what just happened, it make me think like sometimes it is going back, like they don’t share anything.

**When you say ‘what just happened?’…?**

These years, with the Occupy thing, and they start going backward, to the past.

**Part 2**

**So, did you say you work in an international school or local school?**

Local kindergarten. Actually, I work in the university, and I have to go around three or four kindergartens to teach the non-Chinese students Chinese. For English, I can see that many kindergartens having good English level, and they’re willing to have conversations with children, so the English level of the kindergarten is really great. You can see three or four little guys can talk with each other in fluent English. It’s okay, but for these years, Hong Kong adults, their English level is really going bad, just like me!

**What is Hong Kong’s attitude towards learning English?**

Because it’s still the global language that everyone should know, it’s still important for Hong Kong people to learn, but, I can just tell you that, from the view of the parents’ level, it’s still okay to learn English, but you have also to learn Putonghua or whatever. Okay to learn English, Guangdonghua, Japanese, Spanish, whatever. I think, twenty or thirty years, just my kindergarten age, they think that it’s okay, when is really your father or mother will really having great expectations that you having great English, that it’s very good for you. They are- ‘it’s okay if you don’t know Putonghua, it’s okay you know English, that you will be a very great person’ – but, now, no.

**Can you describe your own experiences with native English teachers?**

Mostly good. Some, actually, they are not bad. Actually, I seldom see bad ones, and the bad ones only for a couple of lessons, because the original one having some leave or anything.

Because they always late. Because of the background of Hong Kong people, they thinks that if you leave on time that is no, you shouldn’t leave on time, because you should stay and after the principle leave all the other can. Because the NET will leave when the children will leave, because they do not have many difficult stuff to do. The main point that the principle ask them to come, because they have their English lesson, but for local kindergarten teachers you have to do many other work, and you have to stay maybe one or two hours after then kids go back, and they think that the native English teachers do not the same.

Some of them is really, you can see that their attitude is really: ‘Okay, I can talk to the kids and they reply me. It’s okay if they didn’t learn the words, they didn’t know the phonetics. They talk to me! It’s okay, they learn English!’ But because we still have syllabus, you know, we are not following them. It’s not really good experience for me.

**And then what are the good points about NETs?**

Most of them are really helpful. They will like to see… Actually, because the principle will not bring lots of things for them to do, so they are free to ask if anyone wants help and they are really having… They are really good at giving help, and they care about the children, I think. Most of them care about the children. Even though they are… Actually, most of the NET I see are only twenty-something, they are not having babies or anything, but they really care about the children like their own, which is really different from Hong Kong local teachers.

Most of them are very great, and they will try to prepare the fun teaching materials for them, because, for the Hong Kong local teachers, they use them for around ten years some of them, but the native teachers think of different things and see if they can learn better of engage. For some of them, this is probably, the western teacher, sometimes they will have their own plans and think maybe the children can get the same thing, know the same thing- it’s okay, and they will try to see if it is okay. They will try different games for them.

**If we talk about ‘the west’, what does that refer to?**

America, Europe, something, the English-speaking people. Actually, ‘not China’ is ‘west’. Not Asian, not… because mostly when you say, ‘west’, something about east. So ‘east’ is China or the Asia thing, and ‘west’ will be the other thing, the only thing left.

**Does it mean anything culturally speaking?**

Open-mind, creativity, and I think that they have better planning, and they are more individual. Just for Hong Kong people, they like to be a group, they like to share in a group, but I don’t think that from the Western society. They will be more individual. Why I think that? Because some of them tell me that when you are 18 or something in the West you want to have your own family or… anyway, you don’t want to stay with your father and mother, but for me, I still stay with my family. For me, this is what I think about the west.

**End of interview**

**Patty Transcript**

Bio: Patty’s interview was unplanned; she approached me in Tsim Sha Tsui to ask for my participation in her own market research, volunteering for a Hong Kong Christian Organisation, and then agreed to be interviewed. I learned, from a brief conversation, that she attended a local secondary school.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like?**

Look like… look like… look like an international paradise. Different types of in other countries we can find in Hong Kong.

**How would you describe Hong Kong culture?**

Hong Kong culture is different.

**What are people like in Hong Kong?**

They are helpful, full of love, because they will help another.

**Okay, what’s the political atmosphere like?**

They can have their own opinion. All of them, they can have their own opinion and they can tell others. I don’t like the umbrellas**.** I don’t like them, because they use the strict method to explain what they want. It’s not fair to another.

**Okay, what’s your relationship to Hong Kong? Were you born here?**

Yes.

**And do you like where you live?**

Yeah, I like it!

**So, what would you say is most important to you?**

Most important… my religion, my God. Yes, it’s the most important thing.

**How do you feel about Hong Kong’s future?**

It’s positive for me ... full of the hope and opportunity in Hong Kong.

**And how do you think of Hong Kong’s past?**

It’s more peaceful, I think. More then, compare with now, more peaceful in the past.

**Part 2**

**What is Hong Kong’s attitude towards learning English?**

It is positive, because Hong Kong is the international centre. English, I think, it is more important.

**And why do you think that is?**

Because they need to, for the business.

**Have you been to an international school or had a Western tutor?**

No, I go to a local school, because it’s the government’s to arrange.

**So, when we talk about ‘the west’, what does that refer to? If we say someone is Western, what does that mean?**

I think they are talking English and is nice. They is… when we talk before, you guys is more nice. You will not protect yourself, and you, maybe, just like we talk before. I just say, ‘nice to meet you!’ and you will very nice to talk with me. That is what I think with ‘Western’.

**End of interview**

**Robyn Transcript**

Bio: Robyn is from England and worked in Hong Kong’s New Territories for two years as a teacher in an international kindergarten and as a private tutor.

**Part 1**

**What does Hong Kong look like?**

Grey sky, dirty buildings, everybody is dripping with sweat, because it’s so humid. Just dirt… ‘Dirt’ is the one word that comes to mind. Again, concrete jungle. That’s what everyone says isn’t it? It genuinely is a dirty concrete jungle with a few trees in between.

**What’s Hong Kong’s culture?**

Eating out late, wearing matching clothes as couples, technology, work, work- fucking number one- work! Why didn’t I think of that before?! Work, Jesus Christ!

I mean, I understand that they, you know, need to have nannies and whatever, if they’re working full time to look after their kids, but the amount of all the kids that I tutored, they barely ever saw their parents because their parents were always working. So, the aunties are actually their parents. They became their parents. Work: their kids took a backseat.

**What is Hong Kong’s political atmosphere like?**

Anti-China. They’re racist, aren’t they, to the Chinese. They really are. They just… I’ll never forget the looks that they would get. I mean, we all kind of joined in as well. And they don’t queue, unless you’re white and you push them back into line.

**What’s your relationship to Hong Kong?**

I taught English in a kindergarten, ages two to six. I had a love/hate relationship with Hong Kong, very much love/hate. Some days I genuinely miss being there, just little things. I guess, not so much I miss Hong Kong itself, I just miss, like, the location, it was perfect to go travel, go other countries. The kids, the flat… In second year, the flat was very nice. First year, it was okay. It was alright. But Hong Kong itself, just… we were there for money. There wasn’t really anything else. I never pictured a life there, never pictured meeting somebody there, I just never pictured anything permanent there at all.

**What are your main values? What’s most important to you?**

Family, friends, and being successful.

I think, because I grew up - my dad had an amazing job, he was very, very well paid, and so we had a really good upbringing - and so me and my brothers, we’ve talked about it before, we always compare ourselves to our dad, and, you know, we think if we’re not making the amount that he made…

Money *is* success, I think, because I want to give my family the opportunities that I had. I don’t want to live pay-cheque to pay-cheque. To me that’s not success. That’s just existing. Yes, and work. Just being in a job that genuinely makes me happy, but not in Hong Kong! The aim of Hong Kong was just money, and to avoid going home for another year - or two years, it ended up being.

**What does Hong Kong’s future look like?**

Oh dear, very Chinese. I reckon, in twenty, thirty years’ time, it’s going to be so interesting to see the difference. I feel like China will have taken over. I mean they’ve already made that new road, that easy, fast route into Hong Kong from China. They did that the year that I was there. That was completed. Unbelievable how fast that road went up. Unbelievable difference from when we started and driving to work in the taxi. That beautiful landscape on the right-hand side with all the green hills, now, that’s just blocked by this road, completely blocked by a road. Going through, they’ve built a tunnel going through one of the hills straight into Hong Kong from Shenzhen. They’ve built a raised road on top of the landscape. Straight from Shenzhen. I don’t know where it leads to in Hong Kong. I don’t know if they’ve finished it yet. So, they’re already linking it up.

**And how do you think of Hong Kong’s past?**

I know very little about it. The only thing I know is obviously that it was a colony. Before I went to Hong Kong, I knew nothing about Hong Kong, nothing at all. Then, I would think of China. I would just, to be honest, I probably wouldn’t even distinguish them as two separate countries. I would probably label them as one. And I feel like that’s probably going to happen again in the future, decades to come. They are probably going to be labelled as one.

**Part 2**

**What’s Hong Kong’s attitude in general towards learning English?**

I think they take it very seriously. I mean it shows they take it seriously the amount they pay us to tutor the kids: £35 minimum an hour to tutor their kids or just to speak to their kids in English for an hour. It shows that they take it bloody seriously.

**Can you explain some of your tutoring jobs?**

Taking a kid to Ikea. Yes, to look around different fabrics and materials. He was so bored. There were these little games part way around the store, just in like pillars - can’t remember what the games were - like driving with a steering wheel. So, yes, we spend most of our time on them. I actually got £60 an hour for that one.

I mean some of them were very chilled. I think it depends on the parents. Some of the parents were quite relaxed. Some of them are so intense, so intense, and they have like a strict regime on what they want you to teach their kids, and, yeah, some of them would expect like worksheets and want to see what you’d done after the session, and others just weren’t bothered as long as you were white and you were talking English to them for an hour.

**What is your experience of NETs?**

I’m going to say ‘good’. Weird, but good. I feel like the majority of people who get a job in Hong Kong, as a Westerner, are losers. They’ve got nowhere to go in life, so they escape to Hong Kong. But as weird as they might be, I think they have a good influence on the kids as teachers. At that age, I think the kids are missing out on something they we actually do provide: love.

**Where do you think that attitude has come from- wanting to learn English?**

I’m guessing because it was a British colony and they wanted to remain as a colony didn’t they? I mean they do want to remain independent, which I obvious, but I think they know full well that, because they are so success driven, English will give them the success that they want.

**When we talk about ‘the west’, what does ‘the west’ mean?**

‘West’ means… To me, the west is anywhere in Europe, America, Australia, anywhere predominantly white.

**Anything else relevant for a discussion about the Hong Identity or English teaching in Hong Kong?**

Have you ever asked any of the white teachers about our experience as the ethnic minority? Because you never think that as a white person you are going to experience it: being a minority in a country, because we never are. It took a lot of getting used to. It was strange. It was intimidating- definitely intimidating! I think mainly because the Cantonese language is so aggressive and so angry, that it kind of puts you off from the start. And then, obviously, when people do make comments, and you do start to learn like the language a little bit, and you know exactly what they’re saying and what they’re calling you, you know when they’re calling you ‘gweilo’ and whatever. Although, you know, you shrug it off, but it still kind of gets to you. I don’t know. And then, this time when we were on the train, and there was a group of us stood around this pole, and, I can’t remember, but [one of us] had some friends over, and this Chinese couple were taking photos, and she was trying to push into the circle to take photos, and just in- and I don’t mean to sound racist- but in white society that wouldn’t happen.

**So, when you realise you are in the minority, when people take photos, what is your reaction?**

It depends on the day, depends on the mood I’m in! That day on the train, I kicked off at them, I was so annoyed, and then other days I don’t care, but I think it depends on the person and I think it depends on… Some of them, even if they can’t speak English, they will go up to you and be smiling and laughing and put the camera in your face, and they’re asking to take a photo, but at least they’re asking. They’re not just shoving the camera in your face. It depends entirely on the situation, I think.

**What about at the school?**

It was horrible, because I felt as though they thought we were all princesses and we all thought we were… we’d put ourselves on a pedestal, and they had to treat us like that. That’s how I felt. I think local teachers and aunties thought that we’d put ourselves on a pedestal. I didn’t think the managers did, but some of them were quite judgemental, and they didn’t take the time to get to know you. The aunties, yeah, fair enough they can’t speak English, so you know that’s fair enough, and you know, the way they get treated and the way they get paid for the work they do, I’d be quite bitter as well if that was myself. Yeah, I just, I think that’s the expat culture that’s caused that.

**As in- the expats behave a certain way, expect a certain amount…?**

Exactly, and that reflects upon all white people, because you know, like, even when you would speak to the Chinese teachers about going into town, just the comments they would make about expats. They just have such a bad reputation, they really do. I guess because, talking outside of school, if you’re in town, you can’t differentiate between who’s a teacher and who’s a permanent resident. You know, there is no way to determine who is who. There is such a big difference in pay, they are all wealthy and feel privileged.

**End of interview.**

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6. (10/08/2019): This thesis was completed in May 2019, immediately before the period of civil unrest in Hong Kong, following widespread public opposition to the proposed Chinese Extradition Bill in June of 2019. These demonstrations escalated from peaceful protests into media-dubbed ‘riots’, culminating in the storming of government headquarters and the violent counter-attacks by alleged triad members. These protests exemplify one of my central arguments: the current so-called “period of no-change” magnifies anxieties fuelling narrative sentiment of threat and defence. This is evident in claims made by key members of these demonstrations that the government’s apathy to peaceful protest has forced such use of violent action. (BBC News, ‘Hong Kong protests: What LegCo graffiti tells us’, *BBC News* (02 July 2019), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-48836048> [accessed 10/08/2019]) This escalating violence not only marks a sudden heightening of anxieties about assimilation, the erosion of Hong Kong’s distinct identity and protected civil rights, but signifies a more deliberate, active effort to “preserve” an idea of the Hong Kong identity. Though the 2019 protests began as a reaction against the proposed Extradition Bill, they soon reflected a more general resurgence of pro-democracy sentiment that did not wane after its ambiguous suspension. In this thesis, I focus on how ideations of identity can fuel social divisions, and I suggest that they can be just as provocative as concrete legislative changes. Though often triggered by political realities, I argue that the cognitive construction of such notions of identity and belonging should be foregrounded to minimise the reproduction of such fraught socio-political narratives. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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372. ‘“Olivia” Interview Transcripts’ - Appendix 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
373. ‘“Joshua” Interview Transcripts’ - Appendix 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
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